

The printers of Oxford

By Richard Ollard

HARRY CARTER:
A History of the Oxford University Press
Volume 1: To the Year 1780
640pp. Oxford University Press. £15.

Nothing is more striking about great publishing houses than their impermanence. Chief Justice Cresswell's reflections on the mutability of things, prompted by a case concerning the earl of Oxford, may be applied more auspiciously to the imprint:

I suppose there is no man that hath any apprehension of gentry or nobleness, but his affection stands to the continuance of so noble a name, and a house, and would take hold of a twig or a twine-thread to uphold it, and yet time hath his revolution; and there must be a period and an end to all temporal things, *finis rerum*, and end of names and dignities, and whatsoever is transitory, and why not of De Vere? For what is Bohun? Where's Mowbray? Where's Mortimer? etc., nay, which is more, and most of all, where is Plantagenet? They are entombed in the urns and sepulchres of mortality. And yet let the name and dignity of De Vere stand as long as it pleases God.

Where are Johnson's hospitable friends, Messieurs Edward and Charles Dilly of the Poultry? Where's Strahan? Where's Cadell? Descending to our own day, the transience that so stirred the Chief Justice can be discerned from decade to decade, almost from year to year.

What has made the greatest of English publishing houses so happy an exception? There are, as Harry Carter shows in this fascinating, learned and beautifully produced book, *A History of the Oxford University Press*, a multitude of reasons. In the first place the Press has a long and complicated history in which publishing in the accepted entrepreneurial sense of financing, producing and selling original work is only a part. Unlike almost all other publishers, the Press has its earliest roots in publishing, not in printing or book-selling. Before the Restoration, when Dr Fell succeeded to his father's deanery, the Press has been among the most famous printers in England; indeed, after the period covered by this book, in the world. Since Fell's time it has had a third character as a department of the university, assigned an income, granted premises, enjoying privileges. Among these privileges, as all the world knows, is a share in the perpetual copyright in the Authorized Version of the Bible, an asset of whose present value and future duration Mr Carter is sceptical. Much less well known was the right to a rebate of excise paid on paper used in printing Latin, Greek, oriental or northern languages. This enlightened encouragement of learned publishing was granted to Oxford and Cambridge and the Scottish universities by an Act of 1712. "Neither English universities," Mr Carter tells us, "took advantage of this concession until Blackstone took the matter in hand in 1760."

The failure to exploit a commercial opportunity, not through high-mindedness, but through sheer inertia and incompetence, was characteristic of the period between the golden age of Fell and Aldrich and the renaissance inaugurated by Blackstone. Indeed, even in Aldrich's time the publication of the other bestseller in which the Press held perpetual copyright, Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion*, was so mishandled that the profits mostly went into the pockets of astute London booksellers. The vice-chancellor of the day, Dr Delaune of St John's, seems to have been inspired too liberally by the vision of printing his own money, and to have embossed a good part of the proceeds. It is the strangest end to a strange story that the university, after sequestering his college headship and, over some years, covering his defalcations, at last elected him a Delegate of the Press and of the Accounts.

However publishing be defined, the key to the operation is selling. A variety of motives is open to the

publisher either separately or in combination: to make money, to make a figure in the world, to diffuse propaganda, to promote learning and taste. But except under tyrannies the publisher will not be in business for long unless he produces at any rate some books that some people want at a price that they are willing to pay. This is not to say that selling is more important than standard of production or quality of content, only that it is more necessary. Breathing is not more important than the life of the mind or of the affections, but it is a precondition of them. Publishers recognize this defeated so many of the high hopes and admirable objectives described in this book. "The vending of books we never could compass," wrote Dr Charlett of University College, one of the energetic circle of servants who supported Fell and Aldrich, "the want of vent broke up Fell's body, public spirit, courage, purse and press."

Then, as now, the main method of selling books was through the trade. To give the bookseller sufficient inducement a high discount, always a third or more, was customary. This both Fell and his successors were most reluctant to concede. Most of them were clerical men and scholars of no commercial experience. Even Blackstone at the very end of the period, a lawyer, an estates bureau, a man of affairs who, as Mr Carter's researches have shown, went to endless trouble to master the piecemeal payment of compositors, the price of paper and the methods of accountability, opposed the raising of the discount above a niggardly level. The middleman is so obvious a target for moral, social and economic disapproval. It was a luxury bought at a high rate. The university had no shops of its own, except for the warehouse in Oxford. The only alternative, direct sales to subscribers in the manner of a modern book club, clearly occurred to Charlett whose grasp of publishing technique seems to have been remarkable, but the exclusive nature of such an arrangement would hardly have been compatible with the essential functions of a university press.

What it liked to do was to have an agreement with a big bookseller, to take the great bulk of the stock, leaving sufficient in the warehouse to satisfy the demand in the university. In view of the eclectic and uneven quality of the list this was not easily achieved. What the booksellers wanted on the other hand was the right to exploit the university's lucrative monopolies in the printing of Bibles and Prayer Books and Clarendon's *History*. In this field some notable coups were brought off. The agreement entered into by John Baskett in the early eighteenth century seem to have founded a large family fortune.

The most interesting of all Mr Carter's interesting pages concern the crucial period of the Restoration when Sheldon and Fell, the spiritual heirs of Archbishop Laud, gave substance to his vision of a learned press. There had been presses in Oxford off and on since 1464. In as much as they certainly offered their licence to print there at all to the university's privilege and protection, they are part of the pedigree of the Oxford University Press. The men who worked there were matriculated as apprentices or printers and were thus members of the university. But they were in fact printers to the university in the same way that a man is bookmaker to the Queen.

Their relation to the Oxford University Press as it has existed since Fell bequeathed to the university the types and printing equipment with which he and his partners had set the pattern for a learned press is much the same as that of Pro-Deane Drake in the sea officers of the post-Restoration navy. In both cases there is a continuous institutional history from 1680 or thereabouts. Had it not been for the Civil War it would certainly have continued to the end of the century, and even earlier. The whole conception was part and parcel of Laud's growing reform of the university. The English Church was to hold her own against the learned reprobates of the Continent. The manuscript that Laud presented to the Bodleian was not to be seen by anyone but to mould

into illegibility in the damp air of the Thames Valley. They were to be elucidated by the scholars of the university and disseminated through its press for which he obtained a new charter. His foundation of the Arabic lectureship was intimately connected with this programme. Before the war broke out he had obtained masterships for casting Greek, Hebrew, Syriac and Arabic types.

It was the building of the Sheldonian theatre that gave the Press what every institution needs, a home of its own. Fell obtained the archbishop's support for the theatre suggestion that when the theatre was not wanted for the public ceremonies of the university it should be used as a printing house. The inconvenience of the arrangement can easily be imagined. It is not surprising that the unhappy pressmen and their assistants for the cellars (where they would not be disturbed) and the gangways which could be quickly cleared. The expansion of business led rapidly to the construction of a lean-to shed against the

policies set a standard that SOGAT and NATSOPA might envy. The most dangerous attack was launched in the spring of 1688, two years after Fell's death, by the king's printer Henry Hills, whose religious tract-sheet from Anabaptism under Cromwell to Carolism under James makes the Vicar of Bray's course seem steady by comparison. The indomitable Dr Wallis, Savilian Professor of Geometry, one of the most learned and useful scholars of that brilliant age and to be ranked with Fell, Charlett and Aldrich in the annals of the Press, at once mobilized his friends in the inner circle of the Royal Society. He wrote to Hooke. He wrote to Pepys. Together with the printer to the university he accused Hills and the Stationers Company of overcharging the public: "... we dare be bold to say that Mr Hills and your company would both sell your books at moderate rates, you might employ all the free printers in full work; and the Holland printing English books would be dis-

The text was not worthy of its embellishment and the book was a monumental flop.

Another conspicuous example of misapplied typographical splendour was the folio Bible of 1717 which was too heavy for frail old clergy to lift. But the publishing era inaugurated by Fell was a glorious one: many of the "authors' books" would have conferred distinction on a learned list in any age—one thinks of Hicke's great *Thesaurus* of the northern languages (1703-05), of which Mr Carter concludes, "no other press in the world could have printed it then." And Thomas Hearne's vast scholarly output of the materials for English history such as Leland's *Itineraries* shames the inertia of the decades that followed him.

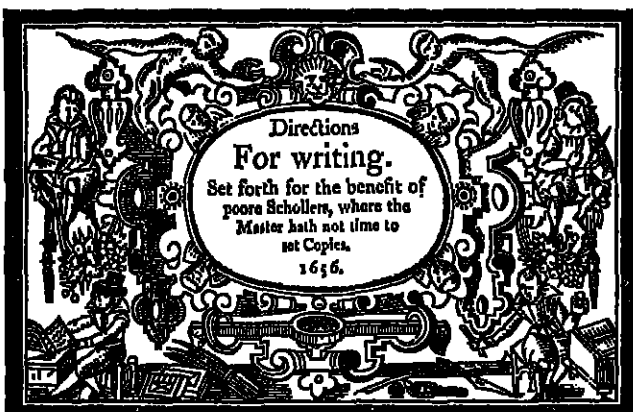
What went wrong? Hearne's contention, endorsed by Mr Carter, was that the confining of the Delegation of the Press to heads of houses by uniting the appointment with the Delegation of Accounts was the root of the trouble. To men who were by definition neither young nor adventurous and all too often neither energetic nor learned the obvious policy was to let the Press tick over as a printing concern, occasionally risking an indifferent edition of a classical text or reprinting the *History of the Rebellion*. Blackstone's appointment to the Delegation in 1755 outraged the somnolent *biens-pensants*.

When he printed in his letter to Dr Randolph, the new vice-chancellor appointed in 1757, his devastating critique of the laziness and incompetence shown both by the Delegates and their principal employee, his success was as astonishing and as complete as that reported of Joshua at the siege of Jericho. Mr Carter well says that "it would be hard to find in English history another such victory of reform with no significant compromise." The inefficient and corrupt were replaced by honest professionals, the costing and accounting were put on a rational basis, the great plans for publishing texts in oriental languages were resumed in a programme that united the best traditions of Laud and Fell with the political learning of the Augustan age. The book does the fullest justice to Blackstone's achievement, but it would be interesting to know why the heads of houses surrendered so readily and so completely to a young man who had not yet reached the eminence in store for him.

The book is so packed with unusual information and so refreshingly decided in its judgments that only a pale suggestion can be made of a reviewer's debt. Clarendon's *History* can hardly be considered as an example of the second; and of the first, the passage on the evolving style and orthography of the Authorized Version and of the effect that this has had on the use of capitals in writing and printing generally. In any work of this scale some errors must creep in, but they seem in this case to be few and minor. Oxford surrendered in 1649, not 1647 (page 37); Dr Thomas Gale, the greatest of all benefactors to the library of Trinity College, Cambridge, and twice a candidate for its mastership, would be startled to find himself described as an Oxfordian (page 94); the

Naked Gospel is correctly given as 1690 on page 258 and in the appendix, wrongly as 1691 (page 221). Finally, the style Canon John Douglas (page 37) is anachronistic.

There are many today who would echo Blackstone's judgment passed in 1755: "The decency of the University Press has been long, and very justly, a Matter of Complaint both to Authors and Booksellers." The price of this book is high but its quality of production, most notably of its abundant and admirably chosen illustrations, is superlative. To bibliophiles and typographers, to anyone interested in the history and practice of printing and publishing, it will be a constant pleasure and an indispensable source. But it is perhaps to those interested in social and intellectual history that it will reach most and give most delight. Mr Carter's future volumes or volumes will be eagerly awaited.



Title-page of a type facsimile (1933) of a 1656 writing book, from Brooke Crutchley's *A Printer's Christmas Books* (30pp. St Bride Printing Library, LI); the books are the subject of an exhibition at the Library (TLS Commentary, January 2).

curtain wall of the theatre. The Clarendon Building completed in 1713 at last housed the printers in a dignity and beauty worthy of their own products, if not in the accommodation that a working printer would have chosen for himself.

The author's account of the typographical history of his subject is a model of lucid exposition. Only a reviewer who rivalled his own expert knowledge could do it justice, and the doing of it would leave little room for anything else. But what gives the book its real fascination—like that of publishing itself—is its peculiar combination of the commercial, the industrial, the learned and the aesthetic. The same man who commissions or, as in the case of the Bible, actually executes a decorative detail for a page-head may have to concern himself with the quality and content of the work to be printed, the thickness and colour of the paper, the cost of composition, the discount offered to the printer, and, above all, the number of the edition and the price at which it is to sell.

The Press that Fell left was a printing business as well as a publishing house. It was in his time that the division between the Bible Press and the Learned Press, a division so complete as to involve a different lay of the type in the case, was effected. This lasted well into the twentieth century. The Learned Press divided its output into "Delegated books" (i.e. books published and not simply printed by the Press, and "authors' books" i.e. those in effect published by the author over the most distinguished imprint of the English-speaking world. The complete list of publications from the year 1690 (when Fell's executors handed over to Dr Carter as an appendix, is the only sure means of identifying which are which. Some loose system of censorship was complete line of publication was from time to time invoked when a particular work looked like getting the university into trouble. Jacobitism after 1688 and Socialism before it were dangers to look out for. But the line between what the Warden of All Souls had called "in time columns" scholarship and parasitic scholarship was no more firmly held than now.

On the industrial front, Fell and his associates had to beat off the determined assaults of the Stationers' Company, which had monopolized

couraged. "It was Holland in the shape of the Prince of Orange and the Revolution that out of the knot. Had James II remained on the throne the prospects for the Press could hardly have been encouraging. His recent progress to the university had ended on a far from auspicious note.

Commercially, one of the Press's most successful ventures was its almanac. The Stationers' Hall, in fact, a monopoly, but after an initial brush with the law, was agreed to for the large and beautiful series that has now run unbroken for three hundred years. Schoolbook publishing, the sheet anchor in the twentieth century, was tried and failed. The Press was not equipped for so fiercely competitive a field. Plenty of Mr Carter is a mine of information on the economics of publishing in this period. Paper, it appears, was the highest single cost: from 1690-1713 seldom less than half the expense of making the book. Plenty of examples of printing costs are given. They would have been even more interesting if they had been broken down into cost of composition and presswork, the second increasing with the length of the run. Judging from many copies to print is and always has been the central decision in publishing. Not only does the price and thus the potential market depend on it, but what is now termed the cash flow. Money tied up in unsold stock is money that cannot be employed to finance new work.

"Learned publishing," says Mr Carter, "does not pay." Whether this assertion is always and necessarily true may be doubted. But the story he has to tell shows a noble disdain for mercenary considerations. William Copland, for instance, exactly the kind of work that Laud would have approved and that Fell actually projected, was published in 1716 in an edition of 500 copies. The last was sold from the warehouse in 1907. By no means all the list was so successful or was kept in print for so awe-inspiring a length of time. Re-moulding had to be resorted to even in Fell's time, and pulping was not uncommon. One of the most disastrous speculations was Morison's *Herbar*, which two volumes followed, the first edited by Loggan and other leading engravers of the day, were published in 1680 and 1686. By 1693, Mr Carter shows, the investment in this project amounted to the huge sum of £2,153.

Contract or continuity

By Patrick Devlin

ALEXANDER M. BICKEL:
The Morality of Consent
176pp. Yale University Press. £5.50.

In *The Morality of Consent*, a revision of the William C. De Vane Lectures at Yale University in 1973, Alexander M. Bickel restates the "liberal" and the "conservative" traditions in the mainstream of Western political thought and examines their effect upon American lawmaking.

The liberal tradition comes from Locke and Rousseau and expresses itself doctrinally in the rights of man and the social contract. So it can be called the contractarian tradition. The doctrine works politically through an acceptance of the electoral process and the majority vote. It can be called also the majoritarian tradition.

The conservative tradition comes out of the teaching of Edmund Burke. "The foundation of government," Burke wrote, "is not in imaginary rights of men, but in political convenience and in human nature." Men in society have rights, but they are not to be found in a contract which pre-dates the society. They are those rights which at any given moment rest on the bottom of society. They are there as a result of experience, tradition and compromise. They are held provisionally and subject to any change which does not upset the society. Stability comes first: the fundamental right is, as Burke puts it, "the right to decent, wise, just, responsive, stable government in the circumstances of a given time and place." Consent to change is not just a matter of a momentary numerical majority.

It must be preponderant, not merely majority consent, and is yielded only to the electoral verdict, but in institutions validated by time and familiarity and composed from time to time of men who are trusted.

Bickel says at the start that unfashionably he prefers Burke, but traces of both theories on American thought, largely as manifested in decisions of the Supreme Court, his survey covers a number of topics; the one which takes up most space in the book and is completely to a young man who had not yet reached the eminence in store for him.

He gives a good working definition of this. At one extreme he excludes disobedience designed to challenge the entire system rather than flaws within it; this would be revolution. At the other extreme, he excludes the "obedient" objection; this is the withdrawal, whereas the objection of civil disobedience is a cooperative effort to coerce. It may take the form either of disobedience to a particular law that is objected to, or of disobedience to a law not because it is itself challenged but because it provides a convenient demonstration ground for the display of agitation for change. In his justification of civil disobedience Bickel does not distinguish between the two forms, so that one may test the justification by reference to the latter form which, from the opposite camp, is regarded as the more pernicious.

Philosophical labels do not conform with vulgar parlance and Bickel sanctions civil disobedience because he is a conservative and not a liberal. The liberal tradition has no room for it; it quarrels with the system. It is a breach of the social contract. Justice Hugo Black, who won the admiration of liberals for his refusal to qualify the right to free speech, shocked them by his dislike of demonstrations. For Locke and Rousseau there was no halfway house between obedience and revolution. John Rawls, a modern contractarian, admits civil disobedience on terms in his *A Theory of Justice*, but in this Professor Bickel thinks that he is inconsistent.

Bickel does not cite Burke or any other philosopher of his school as approving civil disobedience. He justifies it as essential to the conservative theory which must use every practical means of ascertaining the consensus—not a presumed theoretical consent—but a consensus actually achieved.

tinuous actual one, born of continual responsiveness. Majorities exist only on election day and can be registered on very few issues. Government must register numerous expressions of need and interest together with their relative intensities. Civil disobedience can often effectively do this.

But there are limits to it. The first major one which Bickel lays down bars the use or threat of violence, but the prohibition does not extend to violence "predictably drawn" from others. Another limit is that it must not be allowed to become epidemic: "... individuals are under a duty to ration themselves, to assess occasions in terms of their relative as well as absolute importance."

These limits raise both theoretical and practical questions. Violence is abhorrent. But is it a more logical stopping-place than trespass on property? What is the theoretical, as distinct from the emotional, difference between a bludgeoned and a ruined cricket pitch? Does not the use of violence register a higher degree of intensity than merely passive disobedience and ought it not on that ground to be accepted? If violence is unacceptable, does it make practical sense to accept conduct which predictably leads to violence, that is, where the avoidance of violence depends upon the submission of the aggrieved? And is it quite worthy of the pragmatic approach of the conservative tradition to expect self-restraint? Who will persuade Peter Hain that he has exhausted his quota for the 1970s?

These questions make one wonder whether Bickel has allowed what he deems to be the necessities of the conservative tradition to drive him too hastily to an acceptance of civil disobedience. For it is quite clear that he has no love for civil disobedience in itself and that he is alive to the danger which it may lead to anarchy. One of his objections, perhaps the greatest, to the liberal tradition is that it allows a majority to impose its nostrums upon others who may be ought to want them but who in fact do not. He writes eloquently of the "understanding of brave new worlds."

It all rings true. Such a system can surely be built. It is only that there is a name for the means that must be employed to create that system and maintain it. That name is tyranny.

It may be that there is a non sequitur between accepting the utility of civil disobedience as a means of measuring the degree of dissent and accepting it as legitimate. This is not the place to examine the extent, if any, of the moral obligation to obey the law. Whatever it is, there will always be persons who, while accepting obligation in general, conceive that in particular cases it is to be overridden either for selfish reasons or by a higher call. Surely it is possible to make use of such breaches of obligation without legitimizing them. They are symptomatic of dissatisfaction with the existing state of affairs. As such the pragmatic lawmaker can take account of them just as he would pay attention to the result of a by-election. If there is a high incidence of typhoid in a district the local authority should examine the drains. To do so it does not need to have the concept of health enlarged to include

typhoid. So the lawmaker can draw conclusions from an outbreak of civil disobedience without having to concede that it is morally lawful.

But the British are perhaps inclined to be more stringent about civil disobedience than the Americans, who are accustomed to treat dissent with greater respect. Bickel remarks on two factors. The First Amendment with its guarantee of free speech has had to be applied to speech alleged to incite to law-breaking. It was in this sphere that the Supreme Court formulated the famous "clear and present danger" test under which speech is protected unless it constitutes an intentional incitement to imminent forbidden action. Later in 1927 the court said that there must be the probability of serious injury to the state. Later still in 1959 the court undertook the "delicate and difficult task" of appraising "the substantiality of the reasons advanced in support of" the law in question. Thus the court puts the law on its feet. It allows incitement in much of the area that is commonly invaded by civil disobedience. It is difficult for an American lawmaker to say that there is a moral obligation upon a man to refrain from doing what American law permits others to do.

Another factor is that it is in the United States a recognized way of challenging the constitutionality of a law to commit a breach of it and invite prosecution. There is no logical difficulty about this. It turns out, however, that American law is correct in his belief that the law is unconstitutional, he has broken no valid law. If it turns out otherwise, there is no moral stigma attached to the breach of a law honestly believed to be invalid.

But one may ask another it gives to the unsavoury impression that there are circumstances in which it is proper to break the law. Indeed, in 1945 the Supreme Court, which is not unusable, held in effect that a man who foolishly but sincerely believes American law to be unconstitutional commits no offence when he breaks it for the purpose of testing its validity.

This is opening the door very wide. Sincerely in the holding of an erroneous belief is normally in the secular law a ground for mitigation of the penalty but not for acquittal. Translated into British terms, it is as if a man who sincerely but foolishly believed that his party, when returned to power, would repeal with retrospective effect a law which he disliked and had broken was to be found not guilty of breaking it.

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By Gavin Lambert

KAROL KULIK:
Alexander Korda
The Man Who Could Work Miracles
407pp. W. H. Allen, £5.95.

"We are in the show business," Alexander Korda once said, "and we should make a good show." He made a remarkable show: even though, as he also said, his greatest films were those he announced but never produced. If the cinema is a machine for satisfying more than mere eyes, Korda's eye certainly saw more than his films revealed. All his life he tried to extend himself, and sometimes he overextended himself. He had the personality of extravagance, which simultaneously arouses hope and fear, admiration and disappointment. Karol Kulik captures this double image very well in her biography, *Alexander Korda*, which is scrupulously researched and rightly sympathetic, but not without an arrogant touch. She sees that Korda was, in spite of everything, "for twenty-five years the most imaginative and courageous man to work in the British film industry". She also sees that he was a "fascist blend of cynicism and conservatism, a man with artistic pretensions and a showman's vulgarity".

Among the productions that Korda promised but never realized were a biography of Nijinsky by Charles Laughton as Diaghilev (1935), a comedy by Evelyn Waugh (1937), a version of *War and Peace* (1945) and *Salome* (1947) by Orson Welles, *The Old Wives Tale* (1947), and—the only project that Miss Kulik seems to have overlooked—an adaptation by Aldous Huxley of his story "The Rest Cure" (1950). There was also, of course, the unfinished *Claudius*, which Josef von Sternberg began to direct in 1937, then had to abandon after Merle Oberon's automobile accident. Its fragments were pieced together many years later for a television documentary called *War and Peace Never Was*, and suggest a film that might not only have been von Sternberg's finest, but at the top of the list of Korda's cinematic achievements, as Miss Kulik writes, a symbol of "that unattainable side of Korda's ambition, an ambition which was never quite able to realize itself".

The attainable side really begins

with *The Private Life of Henry VIII* in 1933, a movie that seems now only a crude imitation of Lubitsch's historical satires, but remains important for other reasons. It has a visual elegance that no other British film of the period even attempted; it was the first British production to capture the American market; and it made a star of Charles Laughton. (Within a few years Korda also launched the movie careers of Vivien Leigh, Laurence Olivier, Merle Oberon and, in England, Elisabeth Bergner.) Some far superior movies followed. Although dramatically episodic and fragmented, *Rembrandt* is stunningly designed and photographed and contains probably Laughton's best performance. *Things to Come*, the most adventurous project of all, has a thrilling first half and extraordinary sets by William Cameron Menzies. A *First World War* espionage melodrama, *The Spy in Black*, established Michael Powell as a director. *The Thief of Baghdad* has some awkward and stilted dialogue, but Menzies's sets and visual effects are again remarkable. After 1945 Korda produced the two Graham Greene-Carol Reed films, *The Fallen Idol* and *The Third Man*, and his company also financed some notable productions on which he had little personal influence: two Reel films, *An Outcast of the Islands* and *The Mad Woman in the Attic*, Powell's *The Small Back Room*, Olivier's *Richard III*.

Beyond these individual films lies the statement of Korda's career as a whole. He was a producer of international vision, reacting against the provincialism of the British cinema in the 1930s. He hired European directors, Jacques Feyder, René Clair and Julien Duvivier; even though the results were disappointing, the gesture was valiant. And nearly all his productions, even a crumbly colonial drama like *The Drum* and the passionless Anna Karenina, had a distinctive and sumptuous look. He employed Georges Périnal (who photographed Clair's early movies) and James Wong Howe as cameramen, and Cameron Menzies as designers. John Armstrong and Cecil Beaton to create costumes. The weakest point of his earlier productions was their dialogue and dramatic construction. Perhaps because his command of English was never totally sure, he employed too many cliché-experts or reached for "prestige" with Clemence Dane and Robert Sherwood. Nor was he much of a director; on *Henry VIII*, *Rembrandt*, *Lady Hamilton* and *An Ideal Husband*, he relied on cameramen to provide a striking visual surface and on actors to grapple with the script. When the actors were well cast, like Laughton and Elsa Lanchester in *Rembrandt*, that worked; when they were not, like Gertrude Lawrence in *Rembrandt* or Olivier as Nelson, it did not. In fact his judgment of actors was often erratic. He told Vivien Leigh she was completely wrong for Scarlett O'Hara and he contemplated Merle Oberon as Pocahontas.

Like David Selznick, another impresario of enormous flair, Korda wanted his productions to bear a personal signature. This sometimes led him to meddle with creative talent, employing a string of directors on *The Thief of Baghdad*, revising Flaherty's *Elephant Boy*, reshooting parts of *Catherine the Great* and *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, exactly as Selznick did with *Gone with the Wind* and *Dumbo*. There are many parallels between these two extraordinary men, whose paths actually crossed for a while, since Selznick provided the American financing for *The Fallen Idol* and *The Third Man*. Both created female stars whom they married; but Merle Oberon, like Jennifer Jones, did her best work apart from her husband. Both were delicate creatures who more than once found themselves on the verge of financial collapse. Both died of heart attacks at the age of sixty-three. Finally, both were formidable storytellers and will, engaged in a lifelong affair with the movies. If Korda never achieved a single work of popular art as legendary as *Gone with the Wind*, he became the most remarkable single influence on British filmmaking, and in *Claudius* created a legend of a different kind: one of the screen's most exciting lost opportunities. As Korda himself remarked, his footage was as beautiful as anything he had ever seen.

Munich's Marx brother

By Hans Keller

KARL VALENTIN:
Riesenhilfstein
Eine Auswahl aus dem Werk
193pp. Frankfurt: Fischer. Paper-
back, DM 7.80.

I do not know how much of Groucho's wisdom has been translated into other languages; I know that it must have been an impossible job. The great verbal comedian is as untranslatable as the great poet, both of them on the great and subtle contrast of the incommensurable of their own languages and the hidden truth behind linguistic nonsense.

Karl Valentin (1882-1948) was Munich's Groucho Marx, *mutatis mutandis*, which means quite a bit of mutatis. For one thing, he did not travel at all, except by way of airplane record and film, but then again film was not his natural medium; cabaret was, where he invariably appeared with his wife Liesl Karlstadt, the Marx sister as it were. As a little boy, I knew him from a gramophone record, but my knowledge of him was not complete. He specially took me abroad to Munich, to experience him live. After all, though a child might not appreciate the truth behind nonsense, he would be gleefully aware of the nonsense that passes as common-sense truth, as common-sense logic.

Look, to take just one instance, for years I've been walking around with a watch which, without hands, that's useless, isn't it? Of course, a watch it is in any case; you're not going to tell me that you, I could take it to the watchmaker, but from the moment I gave it to the watchmaker, I'd have no watch at all, so it's wiser to have at least this one, even if it doesn't go; after all, I know that it doesn't go, and how can it go, without hands? Or rather, go it can—inside—but it doesn't indicate that it goes, and so the whole watch is useless. Don't forget that the only reason I carry it is because of the chain, for

what does one do with a watch-chain otherwise? The watch-chain from the very word "watch-chain". It's self-evident that a watch has to dangle from it. After all, I can't attach it to a dog-chain, that case, it would be a dog-chain. And who is going to stick a dog into his waistcoat pocket? Nobody.

Moreover, I consider a watch superfluous. Consider, I live quite near the town hall. And every morning, when I walk to work, I look up at the clock of the town hall to see what the time is, and I remember it all day, so that I needn't wear my watch out.

Do not tell me this does not work in English: I wanted you. But then, how well would Groucho's most substantial sayings work in English? As distinct from American? This consideration is, perhaps, the strongest concrete evidence of the impossibility of such translations: nobody would attempt an English translation of Groucho Marx, because everybody would know how bad it was. Translation, most of it, thrives on the reader's ignorance—while the few great translations (Schlegels and Tieck's Shakespeare, for example) suffer under it: in order to be fully appreciated, they need someone who does not need them.

The semantic comparison with Groucho is jolly well-fetched, for, as we have seen, it is difficult to translate Karl Valentin into German, German, or fully to understand him without an instinctive awareness of the shades of the Munich dialect—shades of both language and phraseology. The few great translations (Schlegels and Tieck's Shakespeare, for example) suffer under it: in order to be fully appreciated, they need someone who does not need them.

In these language-conscious times where every other problem is described as a semantic one, it is no harm in being brought to realize that every linguistic means something, even though it may not mean what it is supposed to mean. If it hides behind a linguistic question, it inevitably poses a question—and there are no stupid questions, only stupid answers. As the superior one that the question is meaningless. A question without meaning does not get to being posed.



Paulette Goddard in *An Ideal Husband* (1948), designed for Korda by Cecil Beaton. One of the many illustrations in Charles Spencer's *Cecil Beaton* (115pp. Academy Editions, £7.95), which draws on the designer's own library and records.

Word and image

By Jean-Loup Bourget

ROBERT BRESSON:
Notes sur le cinématographe
139pp. Paris: Gallimard. 19 fr.

Most of Robert Bresson's admirers and, for that matter, most of his detractors—have long been aware of his distinction between mere cinema and *le cinématographe*, an act of its own, best illustrated by Bresson's own pictures. These, then, are Bresson's *Notes sur le cinématographe*, the past twenty-four years, collected in a slim volume, gratuitously (it seems) divided between the dates 1950-1958 and 1960-1974. Though, as *cinématographe* is a word, *le cinématographe* is a concept, the cinema is photographed, theatre, a medium that cannot even boast the homogeneous fakeness of the theatre, but mixes up truth and falsehood hopelessly. In the cinema, films (movies) are the responsibility of a "director", whose whole tendency is from the inside to the outside, a process of exteriorization, aim at naturalness in their speech and gestures. The cinema is the medium of appearances, it is imitative and derivative. Further, it is rough and uneven, and can only be compared to academic painting or, at the best, to reproductions of the great masters. With *le cinématographe*, everything is just the opposite. Films are the responsibility of an individual (who shall remain nameless) who directs himself. He uses models (i.e. non-professional actors) whose tendency is from the outside to the inside. What shows on the screen is their own nature. *Le cinématographe* is the creative art of philosophy being. Using nothing but morsels of reality, it selects them carefully and brings out entirely new links between them. Its surface is perfectly smooth; its productions are similar (as so Bresson implies) to the great masterpieces by painters and composers.

For Bresson's notes are not just his own. A whole array of quotations by other artists is called forth to consolidate his stance. The most often mentioned tell us a lot about Bresson's film theory and practice: writers (Mondragon, Pascal, Racine) rub shoulders with painters (Leonardo, Cézanne) and musicians (Debussy, Mahler). The directors, with the single exception of Carl Dreyer, are conspicuously absent, and only three films are recognizably referred to: *Thirty Seconds over Tokyo*, whose thirty seconds in Bresson's words, "as an example of *le cinématographe*"; Dreyer's *Joan of Arc*, dismissed as "barbaric"; finally, Bresson's own *Joan of Arc*, which receives praise. The various references confirm that *le cinématographe* is a very real thing, not a mere ideal. The beautiful and truthful visual and aural texts that make up *le cinématographe* hanker after the condition of arts characterized either by abstraction, or at least (in the case of painting) by an emphasis on formal qualities to the detriment of narrative structure. *Le cinématographe* aims at arranging patterns of sound, and of images whose beauty and significance are not dependent on the plot or dialogue of the films.

To the semiotologist, such a view of the cinema (I am now using the word in its common meaning) has much to recommend itself. Any film is indeed, intentionally or not, a pattern of sounds and images which may or may not enter into a relationship with the film as narrative. Other directors have claimed to see their films primarily in just these terms. Bresson's abrupt distinction between cinema and *le cinématographe* is that it is grounded. "Fake" movies such as Vincente Minnelli's *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* are, in his view, the best that cinema has to offer. All too often, like La Rochefoucauld's *Maxims*, Bresson's *Notes* could be made to stand on their head, and look just as good. Try it with: "Something called, should you modify its place, may be successful." "What is the meaning of the word 'cinéma'?" "The word 'cinéma' is a word, it has a meaning, it signifies something, it is a reality."

that "what is meant for the eye must not just repeat what is meant for the ear". Some of the techniques which Bresson advocates have long been practised in the cinema and indeed in the theatre: such is the case of the *method* of training actors, leaving them to deliver their lines automatically, so that the proper emphasis and intonation also fall in place, so to speak, automatically. It has been used regularly by Jean Renoir.

More basic and more worrying is the untenable conception of *le cinématographe* as "pure" art: "Impossible to express something strongly through the combined means of two arts, it must be either one or the other." Or again: "Nothing as clumsy and vain as an art conceived in the shape of another." (Why then, may we ask, the countless references to painting as a model, why such statements as "Images—like manipulations in music"?) As "pure" poetry, "pure" cinema, "it attempts to free itself from the fetters of the theatre, or of literature, falls into the familiar trap of 'abstract' music as a model for all the arts, and still refers to something beyond and outside itself."

Besides, why should "impure" art be less elegant, less efficient? What of the opera? What of all the combinations of words and music? Bresson rejects spectacle, a hybrid by definition. But much, if not all, cinema is, precisely, spectacle. I do not mean simply Italian or American epic, the big screen colour, the need not be the norm. Canned theatre has a bad name but produced undoubted masterpieces from Marcel Pagnol and Sacha Guitry. Bresson's almost complete blindness to the cinema as tradition is unfortunate. He is right to reject literature, painting, music. He remarks of the star system that it "ignores the immense power of attraction of the new, of the unexpected. From one film to the next, from one subject to the next, with the same unchangeable faces, the same types, and again Bresson is not alone in trying to secure new faces for certain parts. What concerns me is the implied disregard for the attractive powers of the familiar, of the expected. Directors can play endless variations on 'familiar' types, and actors, in order either to reinforce certain thematic stereotypes, or, on the contrary, to surprise and deceive audience expectation."

"Build." Bresson writes, "your film on white, silence and stillness." Bresson has chosen these his own films on these principles—or an approximation of them, since they do have speech, movement, and sometimes colour. From the endless range of gestures and colours available to the film director, he has decided to use the few, the best, the most brilliant. My quarrel is not with this, but with the implication in *Notes sur le cinématographe* that "who can do it with less can do it with more". I do not think that Bresson "could do it with more" (as have Griffith and Ford and Renoir and Rossellini to name but a few), and I am, on the whole, grateful that *le cinématographe* couples such a small selection of cinematic spectrum.

To go back to Bresson's authorities, the reference to Pascal is revealing, not so much because of a supposed community of religious beliefs (Bresson has often been described as a "Jansenist"), as because Pascal is, of course, the author of celebrated *Pensées*. Bresson's *Notes* could be said to belong to the genre of the *Pensées*. The genre is a trifle old-fashioned, and if Bresson has a few ideas, he has a handful of striking metaphors, he does not avoid some of its pitfalls. He eschews neither facile paradoxes ("In this language of images, one must lose the notion of image completely") nor trivia ("When you do not know what you are doing, and what you are doing is best, that is inspiration"). All too often, like La Rochefoucauld's *Maxims*, Bresson's *Notes* could be made to stand on their head, and look just as good. Try it with: "Something called, should you modify its place, may be successful." "What is the meaning of the word 'cinéma'?" "The word 'cinéma' is a word, it has a meaning, it signifies something, it is a reality."

Type-casting

By Michael Banton

DANIEL J. LEAB:
From Sambo to Superspade
The Black Experience in Motion Pictures
301pp. Secker and Warburg. £5.50.

Addressing a white American audience, James Baldwin once observed, "I am not a nigger. I am a man. And the question is, why do you need a nigger?" This challenge should occur to any reader of Daniel J. Leab's generously illustrated *From Sambo to Superspade*, a comic, and that there had been some comparison with the experience of the North American Indian in motion pictures. The red man had an even slighter hold on the box office, but I suspect that his film image has been modified in ways that could tell us much about producers and their audiences.

What seems beyond all reasonable doubt is that, whether we wanted them or not, Hollywood gave us a long series of niggers. Between the 1890s and 1950 the movie black—whether played by a white actor in blackface or not—was an uneasy presence, a dancing machine, a comic, a faithful retainer, a cheerful flunky, a tainted unfortunate or an ignorant savage. The caricatures of the white immigrant and the rural black were as unpleasant, but they were more subtle, and they were more assimilated. The black person remained outside, displayed as a composite of the values opposite to those treasured by white American society.

Why was such fare served up to us? The author suggests that it was primarily a response to the box office. Some images were unwelcome. When in 1910 Jack Johnson beat the white heavyweight boxing champion, a federal law was passed to ban from interstate commerce any film of a prize fight intended for public showing, and the London County Council resolved that "public exhibition" of the recent prize fight in the United States... is undesirable. In places like Memphis, Tennessee, licences to exhibit were not easily obtained, and the screen image of the black person was forced to be a public enemy. The reality even on fairly factual matters. For example, an exhibitor in 1917 said his patrons liked a film but he was uneasy about showing it because it portrayed coloured people as thieves and local whites might object to this. When, after 1946, the industry started to produce films about the least disturbing aspects of racial tension, this was in response to a search for profit in the face of growing competition from television. The movies were represented in a peculiarly repulsive *Variety* headline: "More Adult Pix Key to Top Coin."

The box-office explanation is not by itself sufficient. The 1915 film *The Birth of a Nation* incorporated many important technical advances in photography but its perversion of history was so blatant that it was banned. Even in an age of strong anti-black sentiment this was no mere reflection of public opinion; it was an act of aggression. The box office (which was not very powerful in the South anyway) may have aided but not deterred it. It did not demand anything of this kind. Either the producers were pandering to their audience's lowest tastes, or when they justified their decisions by appealing to the power of the box office, they were seeking a rationalization for what they would have done in any event. When the industry began to produce films about the least disturbing aspects of racial tension, this was in response to a search for profit in the face of growing competition from television. The movies were represented in a peculiarly repulsive *Variety* headline: "More Adult Pix Key to Top Coin."

But if the facts are now fairly clear, we still have to explain why it was that blacks were disparaged in just this particular way; why, for example, even black producers usually employed very light complexioned negroes to play black roles. Apparently, many vulgar television measures were copied from Britain draw audiences because they inform the viewers about standards of conduct expected in the social strata to which they aspire, and reassure them that they have abandoned the old ways and are trying to escape. On the plantations some

whites helped to arrange formal marriages for their slaves because the slaves' social blundering had a reassuring effect, and among the whites of the northern states there was a great demand for books of etiquette as newcomers wondered about the conventions that were forming. In a later generation actors who looked more white than black (how extraordinarily silly is the American practice of counting them as light-complexioned blacks) were doubtless accepted as models by many ghetto audiences, but how far was the black image related to the new status structure of white America? One could wish that such questions had been explored and that there had been some comparison with the experience of the North American Indian in motion pictures. The red man had an even slighter hold on the box office, but I suspect that his film image has been modified in ways that could tell us much about producers and their audiences.

Had Professor Leab been able to tell us why certain images of black people gained a particular hold, like those of Uncle Tom, Topsy, and Black Sam which feature in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and the scolding but ever faithful mammy of *Gone With the Wind*, there would still be a further question: Why did they remain as popular as they did? This question cannot be answered by a study of the films themselves, but requires an analysis of variations in audience response. Only then would we begin to come close to Baldwin's challenge, for there is a great difference between wanting a nigger and needing one. Whether or not we really needed niggers in the past—and I, for one, am sceptical—it is certain that we are not going to get them in the future. William Styron's book *The Confessions of Nat Turner* was a fine historical novel about a slave rebellion in 1831, but it had a hostile reception from some black critics, and so I understand, black activists put paid to plans to produce a film version. The politics of the cinema have been transformed since the days of *The Birth of a Nation* and if there are any Samboes left, they will not be allowed on the screen.

The replacement image which the industry offered during the 1950s and 1960s was the chony saint. Until he tired of it, this was the

role in which Sidney Poitier was so often cast. The saint posed no threat to established social or sexual mores. He was such an amalgam of undemanding virtue that his detractors could but appear low and evil by comparison. Yet even the better of these films, like *In the Heat of the Night*, could appear civil rights commercials, rather than as giving a rounded picture of black humanity.

As the whites left the cities for the suburbs, so blacks inherited the urban centres and the older, latter, downtown cinemas. The industry decided that "black was box office". First the films began to feature more blacks as policemen, civil servants, students, and workers, and then came the new image of Superspade. He was an aggressive urban black who often played a James Bond-like role and might be paired with someone like Raquel Welch playing (no prizes for guessing this one!) a halfcaste character rather than a white.

Black audiences in the ghettos cheered and applauded every assault on whites, and loved everything that spoke for their own bitterness and hostility, but black community leaders were disgusted. This time the producers were pandering to the lowest tastes of their black audiences. They depicted black women as people of loose morals, they glorified drugs, they displayed impossible and ultimately debilitating fantasies, and offered no understanding at all of the nature of discriminatory patterns. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People described such films as "blackploitation".

By the time the author reached 1974 and the end of the final chapter, it had begun to appear as if black audiences were proving more discriminating. The films which maintained their popularity, like *Louise Brown*, the Blues, were those which had some appeal for white audiences. There was, then, some hope for improvement, even though the earlier history is full of warnings against optimism. So William Styron's book *The Confessions of Nat Turner* was a fine historical novel about a slave rebellion in 1831, but it had a hostile reception from some black critics, and so I understand, black activists put paid to plans to produce a film version. The politics of the cinema have been transformed since the days of *The Birth of a Nation* and if there are any Samboes left, they will not be allowed on the screen.

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The grand illusionist

By Gavin Lambert

KAROL KULIK:
Alexander Korda
The Man Who Could Work Miracles
407pp. W. H. Allen, £5.95.

"We are in the show business", Alexander Korda once said, "and we should make a good show." He made a remarkable show: even though, as he also said, his greatest films were those he announced but never produced. If the cinema is a machine for creating illusions, it meets the eye, Korda's eye certainly saw more than his films revealed. All his life he tried to extend himself, and sometimes he overextended himself. He had the personality of extravagance, which simultaneously arouses hope and fear, admiration and disappointment. Karol Kulik captures this double image very well in his biography, *Alexander Korda*, which is thoroughly researched and righty sympathetic, but not without an astute, unflinching touch. She sees that Korda was, in spite of everything, "for twenty-five years the most imaginative and courageous man to work in the British film industry". She also sees that he was a "fascinating blend of cynicism and cynicism, hohum and conservative, a man with artistic pretensions and a showman's vulgarity".

Among the productions that Korda promised but never realized were a biography of Nijinsky with Charles Laughton as Diaghilev (1935), a comedy by Evelyn Waugh (1937), versions of *Hamlet* (1940) and *Salome* (1947) by Orson Welles, *The Old Wives' Tale* (1947), and the only project that Miss Kulik seems to have overlooked—an adaptation by Aldous Huxley of his story "The Rest Cure" (1950). There was also, of course, the unfinished *Claudius*, which Josef von Sternberg began to direct in 1937, then had to abandon after Merle Oberon's automobile accident. Its fragments were pieced together many years later for television and called *The Epic That Never Was*, and suggest a film that might not only have been von Sternberg's finest, but "at the top of the list of Korda's cinematic achievements", as Miss Kulik writes, a symbol of "that unattainable side of Korda's ambition, an ambition which was never quite able to realize itself".

The attainable side really begins

with *The Private Life of Henry VIII* in 1933, a movie that seems now only a crude imitation of Lubitsch's historical satires, but remains important for other reasons. It has a visual elegance that no other British film of the period even attempted; it was the first British production to capture the American market; and it made a star of Charles Laughton. (Within a few years Korda also launched the movie careers of Vivien Leigh, Laurence Olivier, Merle Oberon, and, in England, Elisabeth Bergner.) Some far superior movies followed. Although dramatically episodic and fragmented, *Rembrandt* is stunningly designed and photographed and contains probably Laughton's best performance. *Things to Come*, one of the most adventurous projects of all, has a thrilling first half and extraordinary sets by William Cameron Menzies. A First World War espionage melodrama, *The Spy in Black*, established Michael Powell as a director. *The Thief of Baghdad* has some awkward and stilted dialogue, but Menzies's sets and visual effects are again remarkable. After 1945 Korda produced the two Graham Greene-Cecil De Mille films, *The Fallen Idol* and *The Third Man*. Both created female stars whom they married; but Merle Oberon, like Jennifer Jones, did her best work after her marriage. Both were defiant spenders who more than once found themselves on the verge of financial collapse. Both died of heart attacks at the age of sixty-three. Finally, both were formidable enemies and will engaged in a lifelong affair with the movies. If Korda never achieved a single work of popular art as legendary as *Gone with the Wind*, he became the most remarkable single influence on British filmmaking, and in *Claudius* created a legend of a different kind: one of the screen's most exciting lost opportunities. As Korda himself remarked, his footage was as beautiful as anything he had ever seen.

Beyond these individual films lies the statement of Korda's career as a whole. He was a producer of international vision, reacting against the provincialism of the British cinema in the 1930s. He imported European directors, Jacques Feyder, René Clair and Julien Duvivier; even though the results were disappointing, the gesture was valiant. And nearly all his productions, even a few colonial dramas like *The Drum* and the passionate *Anna Karenina*, had a distinctive and sumptuous look. He employed Georges Périnal (who photographed Clair's early movies) and James Wong Howe as cameramen, and brother Vincent Korda and Cameron Menzies as designers. John Armstrong and Cecil Beaton to create costumes. The weakest point of his earlier productions was their dialogue and dramatic construction. Perhaps because his command of English was never totally sure he employed too many cliché-experts or reached for "prestige" with *Memmo Dane* and Robert Sherwood. Nor was he much of a director; on *Henry VIII*, *Rembrandt*, *Lady Hamilton* and *An Ideal Husband*, he

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Like David Selznick, another impresario of enormous flair, Korda wanted his productions to bear a personal signature. This sometimes led him to meddle with creative talent, employing a string of directors on *The Thief of Baghdad*, revising Florenty's *Elephant Boy*, reshooting parts of *Catherine the Great* and *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, exactly as Selznick did with *Gone with the Wind* and *Duel in the Sun*. There are many parallels between these two extraordinary men, whose paths actually crossed for a while, since Selznick provided the American financing for *The Fallen Idol* and *The Third Man*. Both created female stars whom they married; but Merle Oberon, like Jennifer Jones, did her best work after her marriage. Both were defiant spenders who more than once found themselves on the verge of financial collapse. Both died of heart attacks at the age of sixty-three. Finally, both were formidable enemies and will engaged in a lifelong affair with the movies. If Korda never achieved a single work of popular art as legendary as *Gone with the Wind*, he became the most remarkable single influence on British filmmaking, and in *Claudius* created a legend of a different kind: one of the screen's most exciting lost opportunities. As Korda himself remarked, his footage was as beautiful as anything he had ever seen.

Munich's Marx brother

By Hans Keller

KARL VALENTIN:
Riesenhildstein
Eine Auswahl aus dem Werk
159pp. Frankfurt: Fischer. Pape-
post, DM 7.80.

I do not know how much of Groucho's wisdom has been translated into other languages; I know that it must have been an impossible job. The great rabid comedian as an untranslatable as the great poet: both concentrate on the infantile associations and the idiosyncrasies of their own languages—on the hidden truth behind linguistic nonsense.

Karl Valentin (1882-1948) was Munich's Groucho Marx, *mutante muniatis*, which means quite a bit. He was a little boy, he did not travel at all, except by way of gramophone record and film, but then again film was not his natural medium: cabaret was, where he invariably appeared with his wife Liesl Karstadt, the Marx sister as we were. As a little boy, I knew him from a gramophone record, but my mother, who was a very clever woman, she specially took me abroad to Munich, to experience him live. After all, though child might not appreciate the truth behind nonsense, he would be gleefully aware of the nonsense that passes as common-sense truth, as common-order logic.

Look, to take just one instance, for years I've been walking around with a watch without hands, that's useless, isn't it? Of course it is, but it is in any case, it's a parrot, are you? Mind you, I could take it to the watchmaker, but from the moment I gave it to the watchmaker, I'd have to watch at all, so it's wiser to have at least this one, even if it doesn't go; after all, I know that it doesn't go, and how can it go, without hands? Or rather, go it can—inside—but it doesn't indicate that it goes, and so the whole watch is useless. Don't forget that the only reason I carry it is because of the chain, for

what does one do with a watch-chain otherwise? That's clear from the very word, "watch-chain". It's self-evident that a watch has to dangle from it. After all, I can't attach it to a dog. And who is going to stick a dog into his waistcoat pocket? Nobody.

Moreover, I consider a watch superfluous. I consider a watch quite near the town hall. I am quite near the town hall. I look up at the clock of the town hall to see what the time is, and I remember it all day, so that I needn't wear my watch out.

Do not tell me this does not work in English. I was born in Munich, I know how to speak English. But then, how well would Groucho's most substantial sayings work in English? This consideration is, perhaps, the strongest, most concrete evidence of the impossibility of such translation. He did not attempt an English translation. Groucho Marx, because everybody would know how bad it was. Translation, most of it, thrives on the reader's ignorance—while the few great translations (Schlegel's and Tuck's Shakespeare, for example) suffer under it: in order to be fully appreciated and absorbed, they must be read in the original.

The semantic comparison with Groucho is jolly near-fetched, for it would be painfully difficult to translate Karl Valentin into German, German, or fully to understand him without an instinctive awareness of the shades of the Munich dialect—shades of both intonation and phraseology. I grew up in Vienna—close enough, slang-wise, to be able to feel my way round Valentin's endemic verbal gestures, his peculiar brand of paronomasia. I should say that a boy coming from Valentin's own country but from a different linguistic region—say, Prussia—would have felt that he was listening to jokes in "foreign" if he understood them at all. A Swiss German might again take the same measures.

Likewise, it would be very difficult to read Groucho without having heard him, and it would indeed be difficult for me to read Valentin's book without the sharply dis-



Paulette Goddard in *An Ideal Husband* (1948), illustrated for Korda by Cecil Beaton: one of the many illustrations in Charles Spencer's Cecil Beaton: Stage and Film Designer (115pp. Academy Editions, £7.95), which draws on the designer's own library and records.

Word and image

By Jean-Loup Bourget

ROBERT BRESSON:
Notes sur le cinématographe
139pp. Paris: Gallimard, 19 fr.

Most of Robert Bresson's admirers—and, for that matter, most of his detractors—have long been aware of his distinction between mere cinema and the cinema of Bresson. In his own best illustrated by Bresson's own pictures. These, then, are Bresson's *Notes* on the subject, written over the past twenty-four years, collected in a slim volume, gratuitously (it seems) divided between the dates 1950-1958 and 1960-1974, though... evolution whatever is discernible. According to Bresson, the cinema is photographed theatre, a medium that cannot ever be the homogeneous fakeness of the theatre, but mixes up truth and falsehood hopelessly.

In the cinema, films (movies) are the responsibility of a director. Bresson uses the English word who directs actors. These actors, whose whole tendency is from the inside to the outside, a process of exteriorization, aim at naturalness in their speech and gestures. The cinema is the medium of appearances, it is imitative and derivative. Further, it is rough and uneven, and can only be compared to academic painting or, at the best, to reproductions of the great masters. With le cinématographe, Bresson is just the opposite. Films are the responsibility of an individual (who shall remain nameless) who directs himself. He uses models (i.e. non-professional actors) whose tendency is from the outside to the inside. What does the screen is their own nature. Le cinématographe is the creative art of philosophical being. Using nothing but morsels of reality, it selects them carefully and brings out entirely new links between them. Its surface is perfectly smooth; its productions are similar (or so Bresson implies) to the great masterpieces by painters and composers.

For Bresson's notes are not just his own. A whole array of quotations by other artists is called forth to consolidate his stance. The names most often mentioned tell us a lot about Bresson's film theory and practice: writers (Montaigne, Pascal, Racine), painters (Leonardo, Picasso, Cézanne) and musicians (Mozart, Debussy). Film directors, with the single exception of Carl Dreyer, are conspicuously absent, and only three films are recognized: *Les quatre cents coups*, *Thelma Houston*, and *Thelma Houston*.

The moral is more specific than our conventional concept of language—a vocabulary and way of using it prevalent in one or more countries (OED) would care to admit, and the implication is vast. One or more cities? How utterly realistic this former cabinet-maker was (who "stole a nail in order for ever to hang up the golden craft of cabinetmaking") when he decided, pseudo-neurotically, to move out of Munich. How utterly naive our culture's fragmented artistic languages—musical, verbal, pictorial—are when they claim universality. No wonder Webern and the Webernites never moved out of the Weimarian; no wonder Cage, without any real musical childhood, misunderstood all languages and the lot.

Yet, without translation, there would hardly be any translations, which is to say that someone might try the impossible and translate these "monologues", "dialogues" (the co-author is, of course, Valentin's wife), "scenes and plays" and "couplets", in an attempt to make at least some little part of an important contribution to the philosophy of nonsense available to those whose imagination might move into searching action where the translation leaves them in the lurch: substantial material for thought there would certainly be.

In these language-conscious times, where every other problem is glibly described as a semantic one, there is no harm in being byzantine to realize that every linguistic thing means something, even though it may not mean what it is supposed to mean. If it hides behind meaningless, it invariably poses a question—and there are no stupid questions, only stupid answers, such as the superior one: that the question is meaningless. A question without meaning does not get as far as being posed.

that "what is meant for the eye must not just repeat what is meant for the ear". Some of the techniques which Bresson advocates have long been practised in the cinema and indeed in the theatre: such is the case of the *méthode italienne* of training actors, leaving them to deliver their lines automatically, so that the proper emphasis and intonation do fall in place so to speak automatically. It has been used regularly by Jean Renoir.

More basic and more worrying is the untenable conception of le cinématographe as "pure" art. "Impossible to express something strongly through the combined means of two arts. It must be either one or the other." Or again: "Nothing as art of its own, best illustrated by Bresson's own pictures. These, then, are Bresson's *Notes* on the subject, written over the past twenty-four years, collected in a slim volume, gratuitously (it seems) divided between the dates 1950-1958 and 1960-1974, though... evolution whatever is discernible. According to Bresson, the cinema is photographed theatre, a medium that cannot ever be the homogeneous fakeness of the theatre, but mixes up truth and falsehood hopelessly.

Besides, why should "impure" art be less elegant, less efficient? What of the opera? What of all the combinations of words and music? Bresson rejects spectacle, a hybrid by definition. But much of the cinema is precisely spectacle. I do not mean simply Italian or American epic, the big screen, colour. While certain films gain immensely by using non-professional actors, models, to use Bresson's terminology (cf. notes from Bresson on *Thelma Houston*), recent examples such as Kevin Brownlow's *Winstanley* or Werner Herzog's *Kaspar Hauser*, this need not be the norm. Canned theatre has a bad name but produced undoubted masterpieces from the outside to the inside. What does the screen is their own nature. Le cinématographe is the creative art of philosophical being. Using nothing but morsels of reality, it selects them carefully and brings out entirely new links between them. Its surface is perfectly smooth; its productions are similar (or so Bresson implies) to the great masterpieces by painters and composers.

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To go back to Bresson's authorities, the reference to Pascal is revealing, not so much because of his supposed community of religious beliefs (Bresson has often been described metaphorically as "a Jesuit") as because Pascal is, of course, the author of celebrated *Pensées*. Bresson's *Notes* could be said to belong to the genre of the *maxim*. The genre is a trifle old-fashioned, and if Bresson has a few of its felicities (a handful of striking metaphors), he does not avoid some of its pitfalls. He eschews neither facile paradoxes ("this language of images, one must lose the notion of images completely") nor trivials ("When you do not know what you are doing and what you are doing is best, that is inspiration"). All too often, like La Rochefoucauld's *Maximes*, Bresson's *Notes* could be made to stand on their head, and look just as good. Try it with: "Something failed, should you change its place, may be successful."

Type-casting

By Michael Banton

DANIEL J. LEAB:
From Sambo to Supersabbe
The Black Experience in Motion
Pictures
301pp. Secker and Warburg, £5.50.

Addressing a white American audience, James Baldwin once observed, "I am not a nigger. I am a man. And the question is, why do you need a nigger?" This challenge should be put to any reader of Daniel J. Leab's generously illustrated *From Sambo to Supersabbe*, and it poses a whole set of subsidiary questions.

What seems beyond all reasonable doubt is that, whether we wanted them or not, Hollywood gave us a long series of niggers between the 1890s and 1960s. The movie black—whether played by a white actor in blackface or not—was an uneasy menace, a dancing machine, a comic stooge, a faithful retainer, a cheerful flunkie, a talented but unfortunate white immigrant and the rural black were also unpleasant, but they were progressively softened as their groups were assimilated. The black person remained outside, displayed as a composite of the vices opposite to those treasured by white American society.

Why was such fare served up to us? The author suggests that it was primarily a response to the box office. Some images were unwelcome. When in 1910 Jack Johnson beat the white heavyweight boxing champion, a federal law was passed to ban from interstate commerce any film of a prize fight intended for public showing, and the London County Council resolved that "public exhibition... of the recent prize fight in the United States... is undesirable." In 1912, a film of a prize fight was banned from exhibition because it portrayed coloured police officers, and local whites might object to this. When, after 1946, the industry started to produce films about race, it was in response to a search for profit in the face of growing competition from television. The motives were represented in a peculiarly repulsive *Variety* headline: "More Adult Pix Key to Top Cop."

The box-office explanation is not by itself sufficient. The 1915 film *The Birth of a Nation* was a landmark in history reached the level of the Big Lie. Even in an age of strong anti-black sentiment this was no more reflection of public opinion; it was an act of aggression. The box office (which was not very powerful in the South anyway) may have ruled out some themes but it did not demand anything of this kind. Either the producers were preoccupied with their audience's lowest tastes, or when they justified their decisions by appealing to the power of the box office, they were seeking a rationalization for what they would have done in any event. When black actors were employed, they were often paid derisory wages, and were unacknowledged in the credits. Not until 1939 were the "white" and "coloured" signs removed from the entrance to Hollywood studios. Even in Harlem black patrons were confined to the balcony and cinema managers would not employ trained black projectionists. Those blacks who tried to make their own picture were shut out from the necessary technical and distribution facilities.

But if the facts are now fairly clear, we still have to explain why it was that blacks were disparaged in just this particular way; why, for example, even black producers usually employed very high complexioned negroes to play black roles. Apparently, many vulgar television comedies in contemporary Britain draw audiences because they inform the viewers about standards of conduct expected in the social areas where whites live, and reassure them that they have abandoned the standards of the strata from which they have been trying to escape. On the plantations some

whites helped to arrange formal marriages for their slaves because the slaves' social blundering and a reassuring effect, and among the whites of the northern states there was a great demand for books of etiquette as newcomers wondered about the conventions that were forming. In a later generation actors who looked more white than black (how extraordinarily silly is the American practice of counting them as light-complexioned blacks) were doubtless accepted as models by many ghetto audiences, but how far was the black image related to the new status structure of white America? One could wish that such questions had been explored and that there had been some comparison with the experience of the North American Indian in motion pictures. The red man had an even slighter hold on the box office, but I suspect that his film image has been modified in ways that could tell us much about producers and their audiences.

Had Professor Leab been able to tell us why certain images of black people gained a particular hold, like those of Uncle Tom, Topsy, and Black Sam which feature in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and the scolding but ever faithful mammy of *Gone with the Wind*, there would still be further questions: Why did they remain as popular as they did? This question cannot be answered by a study of the films themselves, but requires an analysis of variations in audience response. Only then would we begin to come close to Baldwin's challenge, for there is a great difference between wanting a nigger and needing one. Whether or not we really needed niggers in the past—and I, for one, am sceptical—it is certain that we are not going to get them in the future. William Styron's book *The Confessions of Nat Turner* was a fine historical novel about a slave rebellion in 1831, but it had a hostile reception from some black critics, and, so I understand, black activists put out plans to produce a film version. The politics of the cinema have been transformed since the days of *The Birth of a Nation* and if there are any Samboes left, they will not be allowed on the screen.

The replacement image which the industry offered during the 1960s and 1960s was the only sane. Until he fired it, this was the

role in which Sidney Poitier was so often cast. The saint posed no threat to established social or sexual mores. He was such an amalgam of undemanding virtue that his detractors could but appear low and evil by comparison. Yet even the better of these films, like *In the Heat of the Night*, could appear civil rights commercials, rather than giving a rounded picture of black humanity.

As the whites left the cities for the suburbs, so blacks inherited the urban centres and the older, larger, downtown cinemas. The industry decided that "black was box office". First the films began to feature more blacks as policemen, civil servants, students, and workers, and then came the new image of Supersabbe. He was an aggressive urban black who often played a James Bond-like role and might be paired with someone like Raquel Welch playing (no prizes for guessing this one!) a blonde character rather than a white.

Black audiences in the ghettos cheered and applauded every assault on whites, and loved everything that spoke for their own bitterness and hostility, but black community leaders were disgusted. Time the producers were pandering to the lowest tastes of their black audiences. They depicted black women as people of loose morals, they glorified drugs, they displayed impossible and ultimately debilitating families, and offered no understanding at all of the nature of discriminatory patterns. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People described such films as "blaxploitation".

By the time the author reached 1974 and the end of the final chapter, it had begun to appear as if black audiences were proving more discriminating. The films which maintained their popularity, like *Lady Sings the Blues*, were those which had some appeal for white audiences. There was, then, some hope for improvement, even though the earlier history is full of warnings against optimism. So whether Professor Leab is justified in asserting that the film image of the black person is still as coarse-cending and defamatory as it has been since the days of *The Birth of a Nation* and 1960s was the only sane. Until he fired it, this was the

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TLS Commentary

The happy squanderer

By John Carey

Barry Lyndon is one of Thackeray's most dazzling and subtle performances. The story of a low Irish adventurer who launches a rather stupid English countess into marrying him, and then drives her half mad with his cruelty, provided an outlet for a number of his imaginative preoccupations. The fascination and repulsion with which both the Irish and the aristocracy inspired him mingled here with guilt about his own wife's insanity, for which his neglect of her had been partly to blame. At the same time, Barry's service in the Seven Years War and his career as a professional gambler gave Thackeray the opportunity of writing about the contradictions of eighteenth-century culture that always intrigued him: on the one hand the elegance and the glittering salons, and the young bloods slinking their Machin ruffies over the green tables at faro; on the other, the armies of degraded men flogged round Europe, their heads plastered with flour and candle-grease, slaughtering one another on campaigns which could bring them no conceivable benefit. Barry Lyndon's picture of the eighteenth century is far more compelling than the watery confection dispensed in Henry Esmond or The Virginians, and its account of the Battle of Minden recalls the lucid, unheroic treatment of warfare in Scoundrel. With luck Stanley Kubrick's film will help to direct attention towards the general superiority of Thackeray's early writing when compared with the novels he turned out after Vanity Fair. Even if it doesn't, it will still be a testimony of Kubrick's literary discrimination that he should have chosen one of the early pieces to make a film of.

Thackeray's horror of vulgarity would probably have prevented him from allowing his work to be adapted for the screen at all. But if he could have seen Kubrick's version, two things about it would have greatly pleased him. The first is its slowness. The camera lingers over summer landscapes and

sumptuous interiors and depraved faces bleached by war. Lights, so much, he's lying. The past comes to us through the addled brain of a garrulous old sot, churning memory and desire into a salvo for his own pride and resentment. From Kubrick's film one would gather none of this. His procedure is perfectly straightforward. Barry's exploits are taken at face value, and placed on the screen as objective happenings. The narrator's voice that breaks in from time to time is not Barry's but some sort of authorial spokesman. It may be argued that this states the effect of Kubrick's fault, but results from the poverty of his medium. Film can't, as a verbal account can, incite distrust of itself. Being unable to lie, for alone tell half-truths, the camera is badly placed whatever the cause, the effect of Kubrick's simplification is immense. Instead of Thackeray's shifty bravado we are landed with a routine hero in fetching period wig.

In consequence, Thackeray's view of the Irish also gets modified. Experience of his wife's family had convinced him that pride and obtuseness were prominent Irish characteristics, and this is demonstrated in his book. Kubrick adjusts the bias, presenting the Irish as plucky warm-hearted rogues and the English as deceitful cowards.



Barry's relations in the film with his stepson Lord Bullington are typical. Plopped by Barry, the feeble Bullington runs away, but later returns and challenges his stepfather to a duel. They lose for first shot, and Bullington wins, but is so flustered that he discharges his pistol harmlessly while cocking it. As he awaits his stepfather's return, Barry's shot he totters into the room, and Barry fires into the ground out of pity for the wretch. Despite this Bullington insists on his right to fire at Barry again, and this time smashes his leg, which has to be amputated. While Barry lies helpless, Bullington hurries to the Lyndons' stately home, shoves Barry's old mum out of doors, and takes possession.

Poem

"The lion grieves loped from the shade
And on our knees their muzzles laid
And death put down his book"

Don't worry,
poetry won't be as good as that again in a hurry!
New schools, now,
may regard us as a collection of old folks now,
or wonder
what on earth we saw in it—but, no blunder,
what Bach had
(strict formal beauty), what The Hunting Of The Snark had,
corroding
and surreal anxiety, a sense of foreboding,
and, in it
all too, the urgency of the actual historical minute—
these made it
more compelling than the craftsman's ear by which he played it.

Each age, I
submit, has its own particular Journey of the Magi;
they carry
the gifts that alone can truly, faithfully, marry
the ideal
to our hesitating, wavering sense of what is real.
So, Auden
threw round the political nasties a sort of cordon,
immunising
us against their infecting presence, and rising,
in triumph,
a serious singer, a warrior, a Baptist, a Champion
with social
significance (a prophet whose "Woe!" shall
be ignored—as
it always is—no more regarded than Harry Lauder's
brash singling)
came at us like Carroll's Ballman with that bell he was ringing!
Sunburne too
once with the young men at Oxford certainly had his turn—to
be charmed
in evening streets. For some sort of Saviour was wanted,
Dogmatic
are twenty years old, with bats in their belfries and attics,
a top storey
that leans, not to work or moderation, but to death and glory,
new magic—
Auden's wonderful hybrid rose that crossed the comic with the tragic!

Skin games

"Drawings of People" and "Order and Experience" the two exhibitions at the Serpentine Gallery (until January 16) confront each other. The first consists of life studies bought by Patrick George for the Arts Council. The other is a collection of American minimal prints. On the one hand, figures pose, sprawl and attract attention. On the other, incidents are pared down to grids, lines, creases and platemarks. There is very little

'What's in a name?'

First published in 1958, Dr Reaney's Dictionary of British Surnames rapidly established itself as a standard work on the subject. The Listener described it as "a work of scholarship which should be in all responsible libraries, and will remain a permanent record of research and application." Eric Partridge, in the Daily Telegraph, wrote that "scholars and students will be appressed and instructed, the educated, intelligent general public will be informed and impressed." In this second edition, revised by Professor R. M. Wilson, over 700 further names have been added, the list of abbreviations has been rewritten in order to bring the bibliography more up to date, and various corrections have been made throughout the book.
£13.50.

Routledge & Kegan Paul

Gavin Ewart

Patterns of alarm

By Anita Brookner



Géricault's "Epsom Derby of 1821"

CHARLES CLEMENT:
Géricault
Introduction et supplément par
Lorenz Eitner
472pp. Paris: Léonce Luget. 300 fr.

Charles Clément, a liked and respected figure in the world of Paris belles-lettres in the 1850s, became an critic for the *Journal des Débats* in succession to the formidable Deloche in 1863. Monographs on artists, usually no more than extended essays, were the order of the day and now that we are all conspirators there is a great deal to be said for a return to that simple but demanding form. Clément published studies of Leonardo, Raphael, Michelangelo, Poussin, Decamps and Gleyre, and they are scrupulously written, and tenderly hearted. In 1862 he turned his attention to Géricault; a monograph and a catalogue raisonné appeared in 1867 and both are surprising on two counts. The first is that, despite the auspicious age of zeal, the work has never been superseded, and the second is Clément's curious confession in his introduction, which begins, "C'est en tremblant que j'ai commencé cette étude. Je n'ai jamais été autant effrayé, et je le suis maintenant." This is an oddly fervid and even neurotic statement from a man whose emotions had previously given evidence of having been put into excellent order and control by the calming influence of Lake Geneva, where he grew up and attended school and university.

This is not to say that excellent work has not been done on Géricault, although the best is confined to Clément and his present editor Lorenz Eitner, the finest of contemporary Géricault scholars. It is when one tries to match up the facts as recounted with the pictures that the difficulties begin. The "Epsom Derby of 1821" is run under a sky swollen with thunderclouds. A Montmartre lime-kill is wedged into an impossibly small doorway. A monster child, Louis Vernet, lolls inertly in a menacing indigo landscape. Into all of these works are built patterns of alarm and despair more informative than all the hundreds of sketches of rearing horses or snorting dogs, of which so much (too much) attention has been paid.

The reason he gives for this trembling, this affliction, is a feeling of inability to do justice to the greatest artist of the time. But in fact his malaise can be felt by anyone brave enough to reopen the Géricault dossier. For throughout Géricault's work there runs a threat of psychic darkness strong enough to twist the most prepared nerves and standing forth for us to see today in the crusted bitumen of the great Salon canvases or the lattice-like drawings which must be handled with extreme care because the fierce ink has bitten through the paper and the threat of dilution is very real. Violence, secrecy, and despair emanate from these fragments, charred as if by a conflagration, whether of mind or body no one can yet say. Clément's book is justified for his subject was indeed awesome. And Clément's prophetic words go some way to explaining the fact that the definitive Géricault biography has not yet been written, for it demands the qualifications not only of an art-historian but of a painter and

only of a classical scholar but of a humanist capable of understanding the mutation of themes, not only of an artist but of a specialist in manic-depressive states.

His early ambition to be a circus rider was replaced by a desire to paint and he entered the studio of Carlé Verrier in Paris in 1809, transferring to that of Pierre Guérin in 1810. He was no scholar but the evidence of an elegant handwriting, a desire to perfect himself in music, Italian and the study of antiquities. He exhibited his first work in the Salon of 1812; a contemporary says that it was painted in twelve days, and it won a gold medal. He showed it again at the Salon of 1814, together with the "Wounded Cuirassier". Between the two pictures, the first fiery and swollen with energy, the second heavy, slow, and ambivalent, there seems to have taken place some irreversible change in Géricault's consciousness. From then on, despite his heroic efforts to conform to the pattern set out for an ambitious history painter, his aberrations became more forceful, more menacing; the bourgeois fairy-story turns into a realist novel. Before going to Italy in 1816 he was ashamed to be discovered curling his hair before embarking on an evening's work. When he began the "Raft of the Medusa" three years later he shaved his head completely. Michéler mentions his appearance at the opera in 1823, a demented, skeletal figure in immaculate yellow gloves. By the beginning of the following year he was dead.

The integrating force of Géricault's life was his desire to present a great work to the Salon which would then be bought by the state. The impulse sent him to Italy where he suffered from loneliness, boredom and a terrible remorse, but where he nevertheless conceived the idea of a picture on the theme of the riderless horse race, the great event of the Lent carnival that had excited Goethe thirty years earlier. This was to be a giant canvas, probably influenced by the Elgin marbles of which he had seen casts in the studio of a sculptor friend, but the problem was too taxing, or the unknown pressures too great and he returned to Paris precipitately with many oil sketches so hastily packed that they were found to be stuck together.

Out of my System

Psychoanalysis, Ideology, and Critical Method
Frederick Crews

A preoccupation with psychoanalytical criticism and radical politics has taught Professor Crews to confront those problems which most of us cannot or will not face. This book is a commentary on the late sixties and early seventies. The subjects of his scrutiny range from the 'anachronistic criticism' of Northrop Frye to student protest movements, and the result is a process of critical self-definition in a period of political turmoil. £5.50

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tion" in
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history.
De Felice
con
sidered
Fascism
because
it mobilized
the "revolu
tionary
forces"
of the
fascist
movement
in the
first time,
and actively
involved
them in
the system.
This is
not the
same thing
as claiming
that
Fascism
was a
"true
revolution"
indeed
as Mack
Smith
would
have
said. De
Felice
insisted
upon the
reactionary
and
fascist
nature of
the regime
at the
mobilization
of the
Italian
masses.
This
confusion
and another
similar
one is
perhaps
the fault
of the
interviewer,
and I wish
in retrospect
some of
these
questions
had been
more
carefully
asked. It
must be
observed
that De
Felice was
very careful
to stipulate
that the
"progressive"
elements
of Fascism
were part
of the
fascist
movement,
and that
the regime
was un
equivocally
reactionary.
None the
less, Fascism
was not
the same
thing as
Nazism,
and here
again I
think Mack
Smith has
misunder
stood what
was said.
He suggested
that there
were many
differences
between
Nazism
and Fascism
(and even
more if
one talks
about
Fascism-
movement),
the role
of ritual,
the element
of racism,
and above
all, the
conception
of human
nature of
the two
regimes.
Italian
Fascism
had a vision
of a "new
Fascist man"
who would
be created
for the
first time
in human
history.
Fascism
was thus
conceived
as an
integral
part of
the "pro
gress"
(for lack
of a better
term) of
Western
civilization.
The Nazis,
on the other
hand, had
been laden
down with
the weight
of the
Western
civilization,
from which
they had
to be liber
ated by
National
Socialism.
Hitler
wished to
"unleash"
the Aryan
essence
which had
been smothered
beneath
the civil
ized veneer.
This was
perhaps a
transformation
of the
"pure type"
which was
held to be
already
in existence.
No transformation
of the
German
people was
contem
plated. Is
this sort
of distinction
overly
obvious
in dealing
with poli
tical move
ments? I
think not.
Byron
at his
most opti
mistic, Mus
solini
dreamed
only of a
world in
which
various
national
Fascisms
would
come to
power in
country
after
country,
each with
its own
unique
national
character
istics, each
expre
ssing some
thing which
it had
acquired
over the
course of
history.
For Hitler,
the future
of the
world was
simple and
represented
the closing
of a "cycle";
the
domination
of all by
the Aryans.
Here I am,
dear Sir,
and the
concrete
between
the two
Fascisms
prior
to the war.
I do not
believe, as

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appears to be a misunderstanding. One of the principal themes of the *Introversia* (dismissed in a single phrase by Mack Smith) is that there was a "radical" component (which he calls Fascism-movement) to Fascism, which was historically linked to the "revolutions of the French Revolution." This component was in great evidence at the onset of Fascism, and played a major role in mobilizing the upward-mobile strata of the lower middle class (newly mobilized during the First World War). With the passage of time this element was increasingly suppressed, as others—additional, let us say, and Catholic—gained the upper hand. None the less, Fascism-movement remained a permanent and potent force in the Fascist consensus (although numerically small) part of the Fascist consensus. Fascism-movement was represented by those Italians who believed in the "revolutionary" prospects of Fascism, who thought that Fascism would eventually transform Italy and their society, and provide an example which could save Europe from the twin dangers of communism and capitalism. This is the element of optimistic vitalism in the last volume of his biography and in the *Introversia*.

It seems Mack Smith has confused this element with another of De Felice's claims, namely that he constituted a "revolution" in Italian history. De Felice considered Fascism because it mobilized the "revolutionary forces" of the fascist movement in the first time, and actively involved them in the system. This is not the same thing as claiming that Fascism was a "true revolution" indeed as Mack Smith would have said. De Felice insisted upon the reactionary and fascist nature of the regime at the mobilization of the Italian masses. This confusion and another similar one is perhaps the fault of the interviewer, and I wish in retrospect some of these questions had been more carefully asked. It must be observed that De Felice was very careful to stipulate that the "progressive" elements of Fascism were part of the fascist movement, and that the regime was unequivocally reactionary. None the less, Fascism was not the same thing as Nazism, and here again I think Mack Smith has misunderstood what was said. He suggested that there were many differences between Nazism and Fascism (and even more if one talks about Fascism-movement), the role of ritual, the element of racism, and above all, the conception of human nature of the two regimes. Italian Fascism had a vision of a "new Fascist man" who would be created for the first time in human history. Fascism was thus conceived as an integral part of the "progress" (for lack of a better term) of Western civilization.

The Nazis, on the other hand, had been laden down with the weight of the Western civilization, from which they had to be liberated by National Socialism. Hitler wished to "unleash" the Aryan essence which had been smothered beneath the civilized veneer. This was perhaps a transformation of the "pure type" which was held to be already in existence. No transformation of the German people was contemplated. Is this sort of distinction overly obvious in dealing with political movements? I think not. Byron at his most optimistic, Mussolini dreamed only of a world in which various national Fascisms would come to power in country after country, each with its own unique national characteristics, each expressing something which it had acquired over the course of history. For Hitler, the future of the world was simple and represented the closing of a "cycle"; the domination of all by the Aryans. Here I am, dear Sir, and the concrete between the two Fascisms prior to the war. I do not believe, as

appears to be a misunderstanding. One of the principal themes of the *Introversia* (dismissed in a single phrase by Mack Smith) is that there was a "radical" component (which he calls Fascism-movement) to Fascism, which was historically linked to the "revolutions of the French Revolution." This component was in great evidence at the onset of Fascism, and played a major role in mobilizing the upward-mobile strata of the lower middle class (newly mobilized during the First World War). With the passage of time this element was increasingly suppressed, as others—additional, let us say, and Catholic—gained the upper hand. None the less, Fascism-movement remained a permanent and potent force in the Fascist consensus (although numerically small) part of the Fascist consensus. Fascism-movement was represented by those Italians who believed in the "revolutionary" prospects of Fascism, who thought that Fascism would eventually transform Italy and their society, and provide an example which could save Europe from the twin dangers of communism and capitalism. This is the element of optimistic vitalism in the last volume of his biography and in the *Introversia*.

Mack Smith does, that such differences are those between "German and Italian." That are the differences between two quite different regimes. They were differences which the Jews of Western Europe understood quite well during the period in which Fascist Italy loomed on the horizon from the onslaught of Nazi Germany. Do Felice believes, none the less, that there was a minimum common denominator for the two Fascisms. It was, however, precisely that: minimal. It consisted in their enmities and in their hatred for democracy and the form of capitalism which had come into existence in the West. In their programmes for the future, Fascism and National Socialism had no such common denominator.

Mack Smith rejects De Felice's suggestion that Mussolini considered entering the war against Hitler, and cites as "hard fact" the "duces" statement early in 1936 that Italy and Germany were united in a *Schicksalsschicksal*. If that is true, it will come as a surprise to those who have studied the public policy of Fascism in the mid-1930s, when the energies of the mass were devoted to generating hatred of the West. It is difficult indeed to find any major sector of Fascist public opinion which was favourably disposed towards an alliance with Hitler based on anything more than the most transient tactical opportunism, and most Fascist intellectuals, and have opposed such an alliance on ideological grounds. The "image" of Germany in Italy in the mid-1930s was one of a rampant barbarism, a rampant and brutal barbarism. Hence it is difficult to sustain the claim that the Axis was an ideological alliance.

To deal with everything Mack Smith discussed in his essay would require more space than I can reasonably be expected to devote to my letter, but I hope that what I have written will serve to place the discussion of De Felice's work in a more reasonable context. It would be a pity if the work of a liberal and dedicated scholar were distorted and condemned at a moment when a thoughtful and objective statement of the Fascist phenomenon is being ever more operative for those of us who cherish the truth and those democratic processes which guarantee its pursuit and diffusion.

James Joyce
Sir—I am flattered by J. S. Atherton's remark (December 12) to the effect that my biography of James Joyce is "undoubtedly much more readable than Richard Ellmann's, but more put it mildly, by certain misrepresentations." To begin with, it is simply not true that the book "concentrates on the practical details of Joyce's life, to the exclusion of any consideration of his work," as anyone who takes the trouble to read it will discover. It contains the number of pages given over to explaining the labyrinthine construction of *Finnegans Wake* and the elaborate parallelism of *Ulysses*, and the very many pages devoted to demonstrating the truth in Joyce's own life of his fictions. As for *Finnegans Wake*, I did not say it was a waste of time: I said it was a waste of genius.

Finally, allow me to remark that I did not share Joyce's life of "its central purpose." I tried to put his work in the proper context of his life and of his literary and intellectual life with as much humor and sympathy as he devoted to his fictional creations. I did not set out to write a textbook. God forbid that I should be thought guilty of trying to "replace Professor Ellmann."

STAN GEBLER DAVIES.
49 Sefton Street, London SW15.
The Novels of Mrs Gaskell
Sir—As a Unitarian engaged in research on the social and religious ideas of Mrs Gaskell, I must take issue with your review of her novels in the *TLS* (November 28). That Mrs Gaskell automatically denied the divinity of Christ because she was a Unitarian is both an exaggeration and an oversimplification. Unitarians in general did not deny the divinity of Christ, but they did, which is a very different thing, believe that supreme worship could only be given to the Father, but there was considerable variety of thought among both congregations and individuals as to the exact place that should be given to Christ, in the application of reason and individual judgment to the Scriptures, and their reluctance to formulate or impose rigid theological creeds on ministers or congregations.

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am convinced that all... more doctrine is as nothing compared to that personal feeling of religion which makes man live in the sight of God, and love Him all the dearer from the consciousness of His constant presence.

Les Gros Mots
Sir—I have just read the entertaining piece which Eric Partridge devotes to *Les Gros Mots* (November 28). This Mr Partridge tells us, is a semantic field that hitherto has not much engaged the attention of French scholars and in English it has been treated with what he describes as "mealy-mouthed and ludicrously pedantic" earnestness. Here is one matter, at least, in which we in Spain may be considered as not unfortunate. The (more I suppose what I did believe) of the *Real Academia Española*, Camilo José Cela, has recently published the first two volumes of his *Diccionario Secreto* (1968 and 1971) and there are more to come. Volume 1, dedicated exclusively to the *coitus*, or, if you prefer, Professor Guiraud's *coïte*, and its many lexical variants, covers 348 pages, while volume 2, devoted to the male sex organ alone, occupies no less than 679. Both are extensively illustrated with quotations from literary works of many periods and the whole is treated with the scholarly rigour that such an important—though one may say vital—matter demands. Señor Cela has not yet embarked on the corresponding focal points of the female anatomy, to which one may suppose he may well devote a further two volumes at least. Mr Partridge and some of your readers may care to examine the Spanish approach to what is after all a perennial source of inspiration in world literature, and a vivid part of daily speech.

Ibo and Igbo
Sir—Your issue of October 24, containing the inquiry as to whether Igbo or "Ibo" is more correct, has just reached me. If one accepts the principle that people should be described by the name which they themselves use, the answer is clearly Igbo. With a few dissident voices, "Igbo" is almost universally preferred by the people concerned, who now look on "Ibo" as a bewildered foreign import. So much has my own eye become accustomed to "Igbo"—as one living in the heart of Igbo-land—that I now see "Ibo" as odd, if not offensive, although it is only two years since I published a book called *The Ibo People and the Europeans*. (Significantly enough, the only criticism made of that book by Igbo readers was that it was too "Ibo"!) When I began writing about Igbo history and culture in the late 1960s, "Ibo" was in general use both in the international press and among the Igbo themselves. I began to use "Igbo" on the grounds that it was more in conformity with the way in which the Igbo themselves referred to themselves. I also feared that the spelling "Ibo" would induce readers in areas far from Igbo-land

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Ergot
Sir—With regard to C. K. Grant's request concerning ergotism (Letters, November 14), the *Gardener's Chronicle* of September 29, 1860, has this to say about the disease: "This affection of the grain (ergot of rye) has now become so rare, that it is to be feared that the formidable consequences of ergotized corn, when eaten, may be forgotten. It is in reality a dangerous poison, if taken into the body mixed with food, producing violent spasmodic convulsions and dry gangrene. If taken in doses of as much as two drachms, giddiness, headaches and flushed face are produced, together with pains and spasms in the stomach, nausea, vomiting, with cold purging and a sense of weight and weariness of the limbs. Scriver, a German writer, states that on one occasion, in the Kingdom of Württemberg and Bohemia, he saw what he calls a collective ergotism, ranging to such an extent that 200 patients died out of 500. In several cases the very limbs of men and animals drop off."

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Wagner and the Greeks

By Hugh Lloyd-Jones

That Wagnerian opera was a true rebirth of the tragic art. Originally the work consisted merely of what are now the first fifteen sections of the *Ring*, and it was Wagner and Cosima at the end of the 1840s who wrote the rest. They were polite, but could not conceal their disappointment at the fact that Wagner was not about Wagner. So Wagner, came to be added; later Nietzsche came to regret their addition, and most readers would agree with him.

Wagner never lost his enthusiasm for Greek literature. Early in 1880, when he was staying in the Villa Angeli near Naples, he arranged for the three plays of the *Oresteia* to be read to him by the speaker, then Wagner and Cosima at the end of the 1840s who wrote the rest. They were polite, but could not conceal their disappointment at the fact that Wagner was not about Wagner. So Wagner, came to be added; later Nietzsche came to regret their addition, and most readers would agree with him.

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Wagner never lost his enthusiasm for Greek literature. Early in 1880, when he was staying in the Villa Angeli near Naples, he arranged for the three plays of the *Oresteia* to be read to him by the speaker, then Wagner and Cosima at the end of the 1840s who wrote the rest. They were polite, but could not conceal their disappointment at the fact that Wagner was not about Wagner. So Wagner, came to be added; later Nietzsche came to regret their addition, and most readers would agree with him.

Many of our readers find it rather difficult

Many of the 600,000 readers of the T.L.S. read someone else's copy. But remember the law of diminishing readability: often by the time it gets to number three, someone's felt the need for a cutting and a unique feature becomes just a nasty hole that leaves you staring at your boots. So if you are number three or number four on a circulation list, make a New Year's resolution. Order a copy of the worlds most consistently outstanding critical weekly review for yourself and read the paper not only in its entirety but also as soon as it is published.

THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

15p Every Friday

Greek roads to freedom

By John Petropoulos

ASEMAKES PANSELINOS:

Tote pou zousame

375pp.

Meres apo te zoe mias

81pp.

Taxidia me pollous anemous

71pp.

Athens: Kcdros.

In a book market teeming with

activity as publishers seek to satisfy

the Greek public's avidity for read-

ing matter, the Greek literary

bestseller is *Tote pou zousame*,

whose title may probably best be

translated as "When We Really

Lived". Appearing in the spring of

1974 and circulating quietly through

the last days of the Greek military

dictatorship, it has now gone through

three editions and is ready for its

fourth. Through this one book,

Asemakes Panselinos, a lawyer by

profession and now in his early

seventies, has suddenly acquired a

literary stature going well beyond

his established reputation as the

author of five previous works, three

of poetry and two of prose. Thanks

as much to the success of this latest

book as to their own intrinsic

merits, two of the earlier ones have

recently appeared in new editions:

Meres apo te zoe mias (Days from

Our Life), a prose work about a

prison experience during the early

days of the Axis occupation, and

Taxidia me pollous anemous (Voy-

ages with Many Winds), a collec-

tion of satirical poems, the first

originally published in 1957 and the

second in 1964. Though Panselinos's

earlier writings reveal his gifts for

moving lyrical expression, piquant

ironic statement and insight into

the human condition, none prepare

one for the profundity of thought

and beauty of expression that make

this latest work a minor classic at

the very least.

An account of Greece from the

decade before the First World War

up to the end of the Second World

War, the book takes the form of

personal reminiscences. It is divided

into three parts, each with several

untitled sections. Part 1 deals with

the author's youth and adolescence

on the island of Lesbos or Mytilene.

Part 2 takes him through his stu-

dent days at the University of

Athens in the mid-1920s and his

early career as a lawyer in the

1930s. Part 3 contains his eloquent

and romantic over what he portrays

as the noble experiment to enhance

the common man's dignity and

potentiality. In "When We Really

Lived" his admiration is tempered

but he continues to criticize

Western-style democracy and to

justify Marxist socio-political models

in terms of humanism and free-

dom.

In many ways, the Greekness of

Panselinos's attitude will be lost on

the non-Greek reader. Only a Greek

will respond to the full force of

the author's voice and the sense of

subject-matter. He writes about

Greece in order to give a vivid

sense of the living reality that lay

humanity of the ruling classes. This is probably why he so admires political satire as a literary form and what gives such force to his collection of satirical poems in *Voyages with Many Winds*, with its superb use of irony in criticism of the Greek status quo. In "When We Really Lived" he draws on his experiences as a lawyer to describe the hypocrisy, injustice, and indignity of the Greek judicial system. As a literary defence against the sentimentality he also employs irony to deal with the poor. In the process of describing the beauty of winter in Mytilene, he writes, "You'd better ignore the poverty-stricken because they interfere with the poetry of winter. Hunger, nakedness, and an animal existence."

Freedom, for Panselinos, is a value that grows naturally out of humanism: "man becomes man from the moment he becomes conscious of his freedom." Freedom, he writes, "is the ultimate quality of man. It gives ultimate value to all his other virtues—that is why it is indivisible." His commitment to freedom is so strong that it takes on a markedly anarchistic dimension, involving discomfiture with such concepts as social order, social conformity, organizational discipline, or the imposition of rules from some outside source. This anarchistic strain is manifested in his celebration of friendship, a free and spontaneous relationship between equals and it takes a peculiarly Greek form in his praise of *paros*, a virtually untranslatable Greek term for what one might call keeping company with others or for the small circle of persons keeping each other company. At one point he writes, "This beautiful thing it would be if human group activity were expressed only in small circles formed automatically by the attraction of persons to one another, without any external discipline or direction. *Paros*! That is the only form of group life that has ever been devised in human life."

But, if government there must be, then the best, because the most just and democratic, is one that is controlled by or fashioned for the working classes, a majority of any people. In his earlier work, *Days from Our Life*, he describes a visit to the Soviet Union in 1961 (To Moscow with the Youth of the World). Panselinos reveals what that country had long meant to him as a workers' state of freedom. There he was eloquent and romantic over what he portrays as the noble experiment to enhance the common man's dignity and potentiality. In "When We Really Lived" his admiration is tempered but he continues to criticize Western-style democracy and to justify Marxist socio-political models in terms of humanism and freedom.

In many ways, the Greekness of Panselinos's attitude will be lost on the non-Greek reader. Only a Greek will respond to the full force of the author's voice and the sense of subject-matter. He writes about Greece in order to give a vivid sense of the living reality that lay behind surface events. He writes about himself in order to depict his own generation, or at least that part of it which "really lived." In the last analysis, he employs both Greece and himself as objects which will enable him to say something about human life and celebrate man as the proper object of faith.

Because the book addresses itself to the human condition, it has relevance for non-Greeks as well as Greeks and will therefore probably find its way into several other languages. For the non-Greek, its appeal lies also in the perspective from which Panselinos addresses the human condition, a perspective which is at one and the same time Marxist and humanist. Both are inseparably connected with each other and with his universalist concerns. His Marxism emerges from the book in a strikingly attractive form because at its heart lie two of the most valuable values of modern Western civilization: humanism and freedom. Panselinos's humanism is heightened by his rejection of itself. For him nothing higher than man exists and this life is the only one man will ever have. But his humanism also takes a strikingly populist form, as he shows by his disparagement of heroes in history, his aversion to privilege, and his sympathy for the common man. He is at his best when criticizing the hypocrisy, callousness, and in-

actions, all somehow related to world-wide events which he can recognize, such as the First and Second World Wars. The Greeks he encounters are vividly portrayed and include such literary celebrities as Psychares, Myrtilos, Venetios, Varnales, such political figures as Venizelos, Papandreu, Metaxas, Syvolos, and the ordinary inhabitants of Mytilene and Athens. Most of all, he will become aware that, for a Marxist like Panselinos, his own ethnic environment has proved particularly resistant to the implementation of the ideals he has so ardently espoused. This phenomenon extends to many Greeks of non-Marxist orientation as well and, ultimately, to all men who find reality resistant to their more high-minded aspirations.

At this level, the book assumes a deeper relevancy since its loosely connected anecdotes and reflections, conveyed in an informal conversational language, juxtapose the activities of dreamers and idealists with the fickle and contradictory social reality. Part 1 describes how young men formulate their ideals in response to a social environment for whose nature they are not responsible. Part 2 depicts young adults experiencing hope and disappointment as they confront a society for which they do not bear some responsibility. Part 3 displays them, believing that it did something so that men, in all corners of the globe, can know that the human condition is inseparable from justice and freedom. The unattainable is an invention for the purpose of clipping men's wings. Life is not utopian. Those who speak about utopia have not developed a full understanding of man. I think of those who did not take part, even for one minute, in the turmoil precipitated by the Venizelos Revolution of 1917 and the Resistance against fascism and I say that they were punished by god. Those are punished by god who, before god, punish themselves.

The entire book, then, is an exhortation through the myth it has created. Through a remembrance of things past, Panselinos has discerned the inner connexion between our past events and does not trust about the past. In this sense his book constitutes much more than conventional history. Though there is still much that we do not know about him, and that we might have known if he had written a conventional autobiography, he has exposed his inner self and become part of the myth he has created. "How strange!

Sri Lanka's grass roots

By R. J. Sdrat

MARGUERITE S. ROBINSON:

Political Structure in a Changing

Sinhalese Village

376pp. Cambridge University Press.

£9.75.

In contrast with India, relatively

little work has been done on local

level politics among the villages of

Sri Lanka, and Marguerite Robin-

son's *Political Structure in a Chang-*

ing Sinhalese Village must be

viewed as a pioneer study in this

field. Her claims are strikingly de-

fined: she aims to describe and

analyse the changes in the Kandyan

village of Morapitiya which resulted

from changes in the national polit-

ical structure since independence,

particularly after 1956. Much of

her data is derived from the diaries

kept by the village headmen be-

tween 1921 and 1963, but this is

supplemented by her own field-

work in 1963 and 1967. She de-

scribes the process by which the

"progressive" village has become

integrated into the wider "en-

compassing" structure of

national politics. She characterizes

the political situation prior to 1963

within Morapitiya as one of

"leaders without groups", the

leaders' power depending on their

role as "brokers" with the outside

world. Within the village, however,

itself. Speaking of the early 1920s, he writes, "Everything was in a topsy-turvy state of agony, as it always is when a new generation prepares to enter a world that is not worthy of it. Each generation has believed that it will correct this world and each has in turn been engulfed by it, as the world proceeds to assimilate that generation's ideals without realizing it, and appears spoilt in the eyes of the generation yet to come."

Ultimately, in the epilogue, Panselinos sums up what he has already demonstrated with supreme mastery in depicting the immediate and the concrete: one must remain implacable in one's hope for the future and one's protest against the present. One must act upon one's convictions. In an apology for his own generation and in a summary statement of what it means to "really live", he ends his book with the following words:

As a body our generation came to grips with death. It dealt its poison drop by drop. But it emerged the victor. With intensity and enthusiasm it lived, one by one, the moments of a much disturbed century. It is making its exit now, believing that it did something so that men, in all corners of the globe, can know that the human condition is inseparable from justice and freedom. The unattainable is an invention for the purpose of clipping men's wings. Life is not utopian. Those who speak about utopia have not developed a full understanding of man. I think of those who did not take part, even for one minute, in the turmoil precipitated by the Venizelos Revolution of 1917 and the Resistance against fascism and I say that they were punished by god. Those are punished by god who, before god, punish themselves.

The entire book, then, is an exhortation through the myth it has created. Through a remembrance of things past, Panselinos has discerned the inner connexion between our past events and does not trust about the past. In this sense his book constitutes much more than conventional history. Though there is still much that we do not know about him, and that we might have known if he had written a conventional autobiography, he has exposed his inner self and become part of the myth he has created. "How strange!

Party government which was elected in 1960 and again in 1960 resulted in a new situation: in an irreversible "structural change" in the politics of Morapitiya. The old village headman system, which she describes as a system of "indirect rule" was abolished, the headmen being replaced by minor bureaucrats known as gramasekies. Replaced then there being "leaders without groups", a new situation arose where there are "groups without leaders". Now, everyone in the village has contact with outside sources of power, and the village itself has become split into two factions each of which supports one of the major political parties. Thus whereas in the past the shifting and changing alliances resulted in disunity, integrating the village as a whole, new alliances serve only to increase the polarization between the two factions in the village. Furthermore, the processes of change are not fully worked out, and while the pre-1963 political system in Morapitiya could be described as if it was in a state of equilibrium, a new equilibrium has still to become clear.

Within the limits and goals set by the author, this book is both competent and interesting, but it is left with a number of nagging doubts over her analysis. For instance, part of it is based upon an examination of the system of labor exchange employed in the village, a system known as *bandula*. She claims that while United National Party supporters only give and receive *attam* aid with other supporters of their party, SLFP supporters give and receive *attam* with members of both parties. Given the fact that the numbers supporting each party are roughly equal, this seems a rather unlikely situa-

Many years have gone by and my brain hasn't changed a bit, nor my opinion about those men who stand opposed to my first idealistic perception of life." Unlike so many of his own generation, he has not declared to grace with those forces that undermine a man's convictions. He stands firm in his determination because he has not succumbed to life's temptations, whether of wealth, power, or fame. But he has met power because of the many things that life has taught him and in a way that is perhaps, characteristic of a whole new order of temptation, precisely those generated by his own most treasured values:

Only now have I got used to seeing life as it really is, contradictory and fickle but nonetheless important, to feel the wonder of it, to feel the dislike by insisting everything to believe in the future without letting my expectation overcome me. I have learned to wait, to wait for the day that will come.

In short, by perceiving the contradictions inherent in reality and its capacity to fuse opposites, Panselinos has learnt to combine detachment with tolerance, conviction with a sense of the problematic, to keep conviction from degenerating into dogmatism, and, through conviction, to keep tolerance from degenerating into capitulation. Hence, he is able to discern both the negative or trivial and the positive or sublime in an event or person, to conduct his life as a hopeless idealist and a merciless realist, and to make effective use of lyricism in support of the sublime or satire in exposure of the sordid.

Dr. Hudson's lecture, which was dramatically reflected in his account of the Occupation, which produces some figures whose capacity for heroism one never suspected and others who die a hero's death in spite of themselves. Brains undertake a resistance mission which he knows involves almost certain death: Kulehdones, one of the most marvellous figures in the book, hangs about the house of a friend's wife, who is trying to seduce him, during curfew hours and gets shot by the Occupation authorities, who presume he is posing resistance literature on public walls.

Though intended neither as quite autobiography nor as history, "When We Really Lived" ends up telling us more about Panselinos and about Greece than most autobiography or history could.

RELIGION

At the boundary

By Alvin Plantinga

W. DONALD HUDSON:

Wittgenstein and Religious Belief

206pp. Macmillan. £6.95.

Ludwig Wittgenstein said some deep

and difficult things about religion.

He apparently thought, for example,

that what he called "grammar" is

crucially important to theology, that

in some important sense nothing can

be said about religious matters, that

believer and unbeliever cannot

contradict one another, and that

pictures—neither mental images nor

what one hangs on the wall, but

things of one's own sort—play a

profound role in religious life.

Here there is splendid opportunity

for elucidatory comment—for intro-

ducing precision and specificity

where Wittgenstein does not do so

for explaining him where he in-

sufficiently explains himself, and for

showing how apparently conflicting

opinions of thought are in fact har-

monious (or apparently harmonious

trends conflicting). A good bit of

first-rate philosophy consists in just

this sort of commentary: one thinks

of Strawson on Kant, or Anscombe

and Gellhorn on Aristotle, Aquinas

and Frege.

W. D. Hudson unfortunately does

not here properly exploit this oppor-

tunity. What Wittgenstein says is

often obscure, but tantalizing in its

subtle insight; Dr Hudson's glosses

sometimes remove the obscurity but

seldom fulfill the promise. Accord-

ing to Wittgenstein, for example,

"Grammar tells us what kind of

thing any object is (Theology as

grammar)" (Philosophical Investiga-

tions, 373). What could this mean?

Something like the following, says

Dr Hudson:

"The object which we call a col-

oured surface is, in this sense, con-

stituted by its rules; that is, to say,

by the rules of the language game

within which the expression

"coloured surface" is used. So

long as we have that language-

game, coloured surfaces exist; but

if we ceased to use the expres-

sion "coloured surface" as we

do, coloured surfaces as we

know them would cease to exist.

But surely this does scant justice

to Wittgenstein's meaning, obscure

as that may be. What Dr Hudson

says implies that, for example, we

could eradicate poverty and disease

as we know them by ceasing to use

such expressions as "poverty" and

"disease". But this is nonsense. It

is "myocardial infarction", and

surely Wittgenstein would have

wanted no part of such a sugges-

tion.

In his lecture "Ethics" Wittgen-

stein seems to argue that one can-

not say anything significant or ex-

pressible about the central concerns

of religion. Referring to certain ex-

pressions he thinks are literally non-

sense, he says:

"I see now that these nonsensical

expressions were not nonsensical

because I had not found the cor-

rect expressions, but that their

non-sensicality was due to their very essence. For all I wanted to do with them was just to go beyond the world and that is to say beyond significant language. My words talked about the world, but the whole tendency of anyone who has ever tried to write or talk

